



Total Expansion of the Letter: Cubism, Dada, Mallarmé

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Total Expansion of the Letter:
Cubism, Dada, Mallarmé

A dissertation presented
by
Trevor Stark
to
The Department of History of Art and Architecture

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Total Expansion of the Letter: Cubism, Dada, Mallarmé

Abstract

This dissertation, entitled “Total Expansion of the Letter: Cubism, Dada, Mallarmé,” studies the transformation of the status of language in European avant-garde art of the 1910s and 20s. This occurred both literally, in the Cubist use of newspaper as a radical new material for art and in the Dadaist fragmentation of words, and figuratively, in a broader sense shared by artists and writers of the indeterminacy between visual and linguistic modes of signification. This dissertation addresses the long-standing polarization between social-historical and semiological approaches in the art historical literature on this topic by tracing the genealogy of Cubist and Dadaist uses of language back to the work of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

Widely read and debated in artistic circles after his death in 1898, Mallarmé’s critical and poetic writing emphasized the contingent link between the materiality of language and its semantic function in order to demonstrate the centrality of chance in the word and the world. Mallarmé’s skeptical analysis of communication, and his utopian vision of a new social role for poetry, lent his writings a fiercely contested importance for European avant-garde art, which I reconstruct and analyze in four case studies centering on the Cubists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the founder of Dada Tristan Tzara, and the uncategorizable Marcel Duchamp. At a time when optimistic claims for the democratization of communication are pervasive, this dissertation aims to recover Mallarmé’s skeptical emphasis on interpretive opacity. This, I argue, was the contingent basis for the “total expansion of the letter,” as Mallarmé put it, into twentieth-century art.

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Figure 4.14 Marcel Duchamp, *Trébuchet*, 1916, New York. Replica of lost original. Galleria Schwarz, Milan.

Bibliographic Note:

Frequently used abbreviations:

- DR:** Pierre Daix and Joan Rosselet. *Le cubisme de Picasso: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peinte 1907-1916*, Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1979. When citing pages, I will give the page number, and citing catalogue entries, I will write cat. #.
- DDS:** Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du Signe, suivi de Notes*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Paul Matisse, Paris: Flammarion, 2008
- AM:** Marcel Duchamp, *Affectionately Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, Ed. Francis Naumann and Hector Obalk. Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000.
- CE:** Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Confessions esthétiques*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- JG:** Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Juan Gris: His Life and Work*. Trans. Douglas Cooper. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1969.
- RC:** Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*. Trans. Henry Aronson. New York: Wittenborn, Schulz, 1949.
- OCI and OCII:** Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes, vols. I-II*. Ed. Bertrand Marshal. Paris: Gallimard, 2003.
- D:** Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, Trans. Barbara Johnson. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- TOC I-V:** Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes, vols I-V*, Ed. Henri Béhar. Paris: Flammarion, 1975-1991.

Note on translations:

All translations from French and German are my own unless otherwise noted. For Mallarmé's poems, I have drawn on the best English translations, especially those by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore for the Oxford University Press edition of Mallarmé's *Collected Poems and Other Verse*. In my translations of the poems, I have generally not maintained the structures of rhyme and meter, and preferred to render the meaning as clearly as possible in English for the appropriate context. I have done so aware both of the perils and distortions involved, due to Mallarmé's inherently untranslatable poetry, and of the fact that every translation is polemical. I have drawn more systematically from Barbara Johnson's superlative translation of Mallarmé's *Divagations*, but have likewise frequently altered her version.

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Introduction

In the Interregnum: Mallarmé and the Avant-Gardes

In the art of the avant-gardes in the 1910s and 20s, language became both an object for artists and a structure through which to interrogate the status of the art object. It became so literally—in the sheets of newsprint that began to invade the surfaces of cubist collages in 1912 or in the experiments with the plasticity of typography in Dada—but also figuratively, in a broader sense, shared by artists and writers, that the borders between visual and linguistic modes of signification had become newly indeterminate. While the limits between word and image have been probed in Western art since debates about *ut pictura poesis* from antiquity or the Renaissance *paragone* between the literary and the visual arts, the relative merit of the aesthetic categories was not the central problem for cubism and Dada. Rather, this dissertation argues that a specific strain running through avant-garde art practice and discourse conceived language as a figure for, or, put more strongly, as *the very medium of* contingency—that central category of historical modernity and of aesthetic modernism. That is to say, the “total expansion of the letter” across the art of the avant-gardes was concomitant with the perceived erosion of language’s access to the real (D 228).

The phrase just cited, which also gives this dissertation its title, indicates the primary intellectual and aesthetic framework within which I will circumscribe my object of inquiry. It is drawn from a “critical poem” entitled “The Book, Intellectual Instrument” by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), first published in the modernist literary journal *La Revue Blanche* in June 1895 and widely disseminated in his prose collection *Divagations* of 1896.¹

¹ Mallarmé used the term “critical poem” to describe his own prose writings in the “Bibliography” he included at the end of *Divagations*. There, he noted, “The discontinuities of the text, one will be relieved to know, fit into the text’s meaning, and blank space is inscribed only at its points of illumination: a new form, perhaps comes out of it,

Mallarmé used the phrase to describe the utopian expansion of writing’s domain—to the point that he could assert, “everything in the world exists to end up in a book”—but one entailing, or even dependent upon, a reduction of language to “a nothing, acute and ingenuous,” to the “silence [that] haunts it... for the spirit literally abolished from everything” (D 227, 230). This dialectic, in which poetic language could become everything only by becoming nothing—inverting the revolutionary maxim “I am nothing and I must become everything”—was a motive force within Mallarmé’s thought and, I will demonstrate over the course of this dissertation, a central reason for the crucial importance of his lacunary conception of language to avant-garde art.²

In doing so, I do not aim to provide an exhaustive corroboration of Marcel Broodthaers’ thesis that “Mallarmé is at the source of contemporary art,” nor to substantiate Jean-Paul Sartre’s more expansive statement that “it is fitting that... [Mallarmé] should die at the threshold of our century: he is its herald.”³ Very good accounts of Mallarmé’s influence on twentieth-century art, poetry, and philosophy exist, and while this dissertation confirms and supplements the record for the specific cases under consideration—which this introduction will go on to summarize briefly—its primary aims and the justification for its existence lie elsewhere.⁴ The theory and history of the avant-garde presented in this work will be necessarily

timely, permitting what was long called the prose poem, and our research, to become, with a new joining of words, the critical poem.” (D 287) I prefer the word “intellectual” to “spiritual” in translating Mallarmé’s title “*Le Livre, Instrument Spirituel*” simply to avoid the English term’s inescapably theological or mystical associations—which are not as strong in French and, as we shall see, open onto a complicated terrain within Mallarmé’s thought.

² Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O’Malley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 140. [Translation modified: “*Ich bin nichts, und ich müsste alles sein.*”]

³ Marcel Broodthaers, *Collected Writings*, Ed. Gloria Moure, Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2012, p. 238. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Mallarmé, or the Poet of Nothingness*, Trans. Ernest Sturm, Penn State University Press, 1988, p. 145.

⁴ See the synoptic account of Mallarmé’s influence and of Mallarméism writ large in modern art from Odilon Redon to Trisha Brown in Jean-François Chevrier’s *L’action restreinte: L’art moderne selon Mallarmé*. Paris: Hazan, 2005. For a concise overview of Mallarmé’s importance to structuralist and post-structuralist thought, see

partial and oblique. The first half of the dissertation is limited geographically to the Paris of Mallarmé and the Cubists, while the second half passes from the formation of international Dada in neutral Switzerland during the First World War to the peripatetic trajectory of Marcel Duchamp in Paris, New York, and a singular working vacation in Monte Carlo. The exclusions from this narrative of the avant-gardes will, I hope, justify themselves through my focus on a specific set of preoccupations bound up with twentieth-century art's first "linguistic turn."

This dissertation will argue, first, that Mallarmé's critical and theoretical writing as well as his poetic practice provided an endogenous mode of reflection on language with fundamental implications for certain artists as they confronted a situation in which the nature of signification and the role of the artist within bourgeois society were newly and simultaneously becoming precarious; and, second, that even (or perhaps especially) in the instances of the most sustained and sophisticated artistic reflection on Mallarmé's work, the historian faces a situation in which the linearity and continuity of aesthetic transmission and reception can no longer be mobilized in a straightforward fashion, for these were precisely the terms infused with the greatest uncertainty by the figures in question. To cite one example, in 1915, when Duchamp was studying the definitive and posthumous edition of Mallarmé's final poem *Un Coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard* (written 1896; published 1914)—at the very moment when he was codifying the readymade—the words of greatest significance, the ones that he copied out, fragmented, and objectified (by drawing boxes around them), were the last words of the poem: "*Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés*" ["Every Thought emits a Throw of the

the selection of texts translated and arranged as "The Central Case of Mallarmé," as well as Jeffrey Mehlman's introduction, "Ad Centrum?" in *Literary Debate: Texts and Contexts: Postwar French Thought, vol. II*, eds. Denis Hollier and Jeffrey Mehlman, New York: New Press, 1999, pp. 168-255. Within literary studies, the terrain is of course vast, especially in French scholarship. In English a very good text on Mallarmé's Symbolist heirs is Richard Cándida Smith, *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Dice.”]⁵ From Mallarmé, Duchamp received the lesson that every communicative act is a perilous wager launched into an uncertain future.

On the one hand, therefore, this dissertation tells a story of the fierce debates, the appropriations and the misprisions that accompanied the encounter of certain artists with Mallarmé’s work—a story traced in the library, archive and the museum, through correspondence, aesthetic treatises, private notes, public tracts, and, most importantly, works of art. But on the other hand, it poses questions at the meta-historical level about the status of aesthetic transmission, and about the structures of epistemic stability and rupture.⁶ It does so because Mallarmé’s investigations of language were intrinsically linked to his development of a theory of aesthetic reception appropriate to modernity, one based, in other words, on withdrawal, deferral, and indeterminacy.

In his book *What is Art?*, written in 1897, Leo Tolstoy cited Mallarmé’s late sonnet *À la nue accablante tu* (1895) as an example of a poem with “no meaning whatever.”⁷ This was only the latest insult from the Russian realist, who, in an interview with the popular French daily newspaper *Le Gaulois* in 1894, excoriated a harmful tendency among French authors, gifted with “a language so beautiful, so noble, so pure” to “torture” the words as well as their readers. As an example, Tolstoy passed the reporter a Russian review, and asked him to read aloud what is evidently Mallarmé’s *M’introduire dans ton histoire* (1886). Tolstoy noted, “I’d very much like to know what this author meant. There are beautiful rhymes—‘*attentatoire et*

⁵ Marcel Duchamp, “Quand bien même...” in the Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, box 43, folio 26.

⁶ For example, in Chapter One, I trace the impact of Georg Simmel’s anti-historicist approach on Kahnweiler’s worldview. See Georg Simmel, “How is History Possible,” *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

⁷ Leo Tolstoy, *What is art? (Chto takoye iskusstvo?)*, London: Walter Scott, 1898, pp. 79-80. Mallarmé’s sonnet was first published in the first issue of the German magazine *Pan* in 1895.

territoire’—but I’ve understood nothing.... Do you understand the meaning? Me, not at all. Not a period, not a comma.”⁸ In response, Mallarmé sent a note to Tolstoy’s French translator in June 1898, in which he opposed Tolstoy’s “essentially communicative” conception of art with a counter-model in which the work of art would be “disseminated to *whomever* [*à qui veut*] but, first, as a result of a withdrawal or isolation.”⁹ When it appeared in print in February 1899, this description of a work of art addressing itself to a public that may or may not emerge in some uncertain future, all the while revoking the possibility of communication in the present, struck the nineteen-year-old Guillaume Apollinaire to the point that he scrupulously transcribed it on an envelope.¹⁰ It might perhaps have been all the more poignant to the young poet because Mallarmé had definitively withdrawn only five months prior, succumbing with supreme irony to a spasm of the larynx at age 56.

As an exemplary case of “courage” in the face of a culture lagging behind aesthetics, both Apollinaire and the cubists’ first dealer and greatest theoretician Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler ritually cited the case of Mallarmé’s passionate advocacy for the painting of his intimate friend Édouard Manet.¹¹ In an essay criticizing the rejection of two of Manet’s paintings by the Jury of the Salon of 1874, Mallarmé claimed that the painterly qualities that the jury considered

⁸ Henry Lapauze, “Une soirée chez Léon Tolstoï,” *Le Gaulois*, Friday June 12 1896, p. 2.

⁹ Ély Halpérine-Kaminsky solicited Mallarmé’s letter for a French account of *What is Art?* entitled *Le Rôle de l’art d’après Tolstoï*, which included responses from writers that Tolstoy mentioned in his text. See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance; Lettres sur la poésie*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, p. 640.

¹⁰ See note from Getty: Guillaume Apollinaire notes on art, 1899-1914 (88-A251 880268). Willard Bohn discusses this note in his essay “Apollinaire au Center Getty,” *Que Vlo-Ve ?* V. 4 N. 4 (October-December 1998): 117-122.

¹¹ Kahnweiler cites this in “Mallarmé et la peinture” (CE 215-217). Apollinaire cites this review in an undated and unpublished manuscript note entitled “Conférence sur l’art nouveau,” likely from 1910 (Fonds Apollinaire, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet: MS 7544). He also recounts Mallarmé’s defense of Manet in his review of the 1910 Salon des Indépendants: Apollinaire, “Watch out for the Paint! The Salon des Indépendants, 6000 paintings are exhibited” in Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art*, New York: Viking Press, 1972, p. 64. The relationship between Manet and Mallarmé is far too complex to enter into here. Mallarmé, writing to Verlaine after Manet’s death, noted, “For ten years, I saw dear Manet every day—his absence now seems to me unbelievable!” (D 5).

“unfinished” were the result of “the simplification achieved by a visionary gaze... upon certain procedures of painting, the principal failing of which is to veil the origins of this art made of ointments and colors” (OCII 411).¹² One of the rejected paintings, *Le bal de l’Opéra*, 1873, Mallarmé noted, had pulled back this veil and depicted a contemporary Parisian crowd through “the pure medium of this art,” which is to say with the forthrightly declared materiality of paint itself. Manet’s gesture of aesthetic disillusionment, Mallarmé declared, had inserted a gap of non-synchronous historical time into the modern work of art, one that secured its current “illegibility” but guaranteed its future contact with “the Crowd” [*la Foule*] (OCII 411). In an oracular pronouncement, Mallarmé promised his readers that “the crowd, from whom nothing is concealed, seeing that everything emanates from it, *will recognize itself, one day or another*, in [Manet’s] accumulated and surviving work: and its detachment from things past will be, this time, no less than absolute” (OCII 414).

From the outset of cubism’s reception, the work of Picasso and Braque was perceived as intimately tied to Mallarméan poetry: from a parliamentary debate on the obscurity of modern art in 1912 to Roger Allard’s pejorative remark from 1911 that Picasso’s most recent work resembled a “composite mallarmism,” or to Amédée Ozenfant’s claim, expressed in an ominous language of classicist order conscripted toward the xenophobic nationalism of the war years, that cubism sought to “scour plastic art of its parasite terms, as Mallarmé had attempted for verbal language.”¹³ If the Parisian cultural world yoked Mallarmé and cubism together in

¹² Cited by Kahnweiler in CE 216.

¹³ Cubism and Mallarmé were discussed together in a parliamentary debate on December 12, 1912, in which M. Marcel Sembat defends Cubism against charges of obscurity and insincerity. Noting that “The Cubists will never unleash as much indignation as the symbolists,” Sembat argued “Let me ask those of you who still do not understand the poems of the symbolists and of Stéphane Mallarmé, would you think of denying the profound and felicitous influence that the movement centered around Mallarmé, and the symbolist movement, exerted on the subsequent evolution of French literature?” See Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten *A cubism reader: Documents and Criticism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp. 400-402. See Roger Allard “Sur quelques

their shared incomprehensibility, within the circle of the Montmartre cubists, Mallarmé stood for the “hope,” given voice in his essay on Manet, that the public would one day recognize the very conditions of their sociability in the self-critical spirit of modern painting, according to the retroactive or *ex post facto* model of reception and legitimization in modernity.

However, the most detailed and important accounts of Mallarmé’s significance for cubism are mostly retrospective in nature, offered with the benefit of hindsight. Georges Braque, for example, later described his cubism with reference to Mallarmé’s late sonnet “*Une dentelle s’abolit*” (1887) and its crucial alliterative lines, “*Mais, chez qui du rêve se dore/Tristement dort une mandore/Aux creux néant musician*” (“But in one gilded by his dreams/There sadly sleeps a mandora/In the hollow void musician”) (OCI 42). Braque proposed, “The point of departure is the void [*le néant*], a harmony where speech extends further, has a sense. When we arrive in this intellectual void, this ‘hollow void musician’ as Mallarmé wrote, then we have entered into Painting.”¹⁴ These suggestive phrases have been convincingly linked by Jean-François Chevrier to the title of Braque’s painting *La Mandore*, 1909-10, (Figure 0.1) in which, further, no depicted musician plays the instrument that nevertheless harmonizes between figure and ground by subjecting each to an equal force of

peintres,” *Les Marches du Sud-Ouest*, (June 1911): 57-64, reproduced in Antliff and Leighten, *A Cubism Reader*, p. 114. For Ozenfant’s claim that “CUBISM IS A MOVEMENT OF PURISM,” see his “Notes sur le cubisme,” *L’Élan*, n. 1, December 1, 1916, p. 3.

¹⁴ Louis Goldaine and Pierre Astrer, *Ces peintres vous parlent*, Paris: Les Éditions du temps, 1964, p. 18. Cited by Chevrier, p. 113. As Jean-François Chevrier notes, the Russian modernist Yakov Tugendhold had this same poem on his lips when recounting a visit to Picasso’s studio before World War I. Tugendhold wrote, “‘Une bouteille sur une table, m’a-t-il dit, est aussi importante qu’un tableau religieux.’ *La Guitare* ne lui inspire aucune analogie sentimentale ou humaine, comme elle inspirait Mallarmé (‘Une dentelle s’abolit...’), et il en montre tous les éléments dans un chaos centrifuge.” Tugendhold, “La Collection Française de S.I. Chtchoukine,” *Apollon* n. 1 (1914). Translated in *Les Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, n. 4 (April-June 1980): p. 317. Cited in Chevrier, p. 113

fragmentation and “rhythmization,” anchored in the “hollow void” of the central faceted sound hole.¹⁵

Likewise, in the 1940s, Kahnweiler argued that “If the cubists had the courage to [create new signs], the conviction that these signs would be ‘read’ in the end was thanks to Mallarmé” (CE 219). This argument will be analyzed in depth in Chapter One, but it is worth noting that Kahnweiler perceived the connection, in Mallarmé’s work, between this extended and uncertain temporality of reception and the nature of writing itself, which, whether the writer and reader recognize it or not, is always marked by a delay or deferral between the graphic sign’s materiality and its meaning. Lacking the straightforwardly redemptive cast given by Kahnweiler, language and modernity were united in Mallarmé’s thought by a conception of time that was rigorously asynchronic and non-linear, that was, to borrow terms from Eva Geulen, “at once precipitous and belated.”¹⁶ As Mallarmé wrote, in one of his most important formulations,

There’s no such thing as the Present, no—a present doesn’t exist... For lack of the Crowd’s declaring itself, for lack of—everything. Uninformed are those who would proclaim themselves their own contemporaries, deserting, usurping, with equal impudence, when the past seems to cease and when the future where the two would perplexedly mix again seems to stall, in view of masking the gap. (D 218)

In contradistinction to Arthur Rimbaud’s proclamation that “one must be absolutely modern,” Mallarmé not only marked the distance separating his poetic work from its historical present, but also seemed to deny the very possibility of artistic and historical contemporaneity. Mallarmé had the sense of living “in the interregnum,” in a period of historical latency that had

¹⁵ Chevrier, p. 113. The term “rhythmization” is Kahnweiler’s and is used in RC 12.

¹⁶ Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 1

“outlived beauty” but that lacked the conditions for “The future verse to be released/From its precious dwelling” (D 12; OCI 30).

For reasons to be established, Mallarmé felt that modernity had destroyed the social conditions that had once secured the place of the artist and poet in the human community—like Wagner, he pointed to the organic relationship between Greek theater and democracy as the lost exemplar. Indeed, Mallarmé wrote, “In an unstable society, lacking unity, no stable and definitive art can be created” (OCII 697-698). From this fractured social totality, “an unexplained need for individuality arises,” which Mallarmé saw epitomized in the *vers libre* poets of the 1880s, like René Ghil and Gustave Kahn, who sought to cast off the strictures of meter and verse as historically and aesthetically obsolete. Ghil, for example, who had been directly inspired by Mallarmé, described writers “counting poetic lines on their fingers” left in the dust by the *vers libristes*, who derived from Hermann von Helmholtz “the laws of a verbal music.”¹⁷ The conception of poetry shared by this generation, Mallarmé felt, was one in which “each poet goes into his own corner to play, on a flute very much his own, whatever tune he wishes” (OCII 698). For Mallarmé, conversely, the solution would not be found in the dominance of the poetic ego—which would lead to a proliferation of incompatible styles mimetically tied to a shattered society—nor in a conservative hope for the return of the collective forms of the past. Rather, to a perplexed literary public, Mallarmé advanced the cause of depersonalization as the appropriate “attitude of the poet in a period such as this one, where he is on strike before society” (OCII 700). “The case of the poet, in this society that does not permit him to live,” Mallarmé proposed, “is the case of a person who isolates himself to sculpt his own grave” (OCII 700). Such a poetic “withdrawal” would reflect the actual social

¹⁷ OCII 698. René Ghil, *Methode évolutive-instrumentiste d'une poésie rationnelle*, Paris: Albert Savine 1889, p. 12. On the scientific pretensions of *vers libre*, see Robert Michael Brain, “Genealogy of ‘Zang Tumb Tumb’: Experimental Phonetics, Vers Libre, and Modernist Sound Art,” *Grey Room*, 43 (Spring 2011): 88-117.

marginality of poetry in his present, while reserving within itself the potential to give form to the “Mystery” of “the Crowd... stripped of all personality, for it is based on our multiplicity,” which is to say of human variability in its generic and universal form (D 111). Chapter Two will delve into this anonymous aesthetic and Chapter Three will discuss Mallarmé’s utopian vision of an art form appropriate for a future secular and radically democratic society that, he knew, may never arrive. For the time being, however, Mallarmé proposed, “writing itself is out of place” (D 184).

Today, Mallarmé is primarily known for *Un Coup de Dés*, a poem that he first published in 1897 in the international revue *Cosmopolis*, but which was only released according to the poet’s specifications in the posthumous 1914 edition by the *Nouvelle revue Française*.¹⁸ The poem’s unique spatial and typographical format, with fragmented phrases and words spreading across its 21 pages in a variety of sizes and emphases, emerged as though without precedent to inspire a century’s worth of experiments with the plasticity of the word, from Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* and Futurist *Parole in Libertà* to Cubist and Dada montage practices. Indeed, Futurist circles in Russia and Italy, with their exploration of the materiality of language (to say nothing of their assertion of porous borders between painting and poetry) were often more clear-sighted about the radical transformation to poetics inaugurated by Mallarmé’s final poem than French artists, who remained tied to a moribund discourse of purism (aesthetic and national).¹⁹ Indeed, one observer noted in 1914 that the entire project of Russian Futurism could be conceived as a “Mallarméism upside down,” and, for all his bluster against

¹⁸ On the difference between the editions, and the reception of the poem, see the exhaustive study Thierry Roger, *L’archive du Coup de dés: Étude critique de la réception d’Un Coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le hasard de Mallarmé, 1897-2007*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010. See also Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, “Note relative au Coup de Dés,” *Critique* N. 397-398 (June-July 1980): 633-659.

¹⁹ See Christine Poggi’s chapter “Collage Poems: From Words in Freedom to Free-Word Pictures,” in *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage*, New Haven: Yale University Press, c1992, pp. 194-227.

Mallarmé's "static ideal," Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was the first to translate Mallarmé's collection *Vers et prose* into Italian, in 1908, the year prior to his foundation of Italian Futurism.²⁰ By 1916, the Futurist painter Gino Severini could write in *La Mercure de France* that the "the plastic work corresponding to the poetic work of Mallarmé exists only today."²¹ Like Kahnweiler, Severini insisted that Mallarmé's poetry was only superficially related to the painting of the Impressionists: the parallel between Monet and Mallarmé indicated by Remy de Gourmont, Severini wrote, was "impossible," as "Mallarmé saw and thought; Monet only saw.... The Impressionists barely stammered the new language of which Mallarmé alone began to conceive the architecture."²² Citing Mallarmé's introduction to *Un Coup de Dés*, Severini argued that, like the cubist division and synthesis of depicted objects, "Words, chosen by Mallarmé according to their complementary qualities and employed in groups or separated, constitute a technique for expressing a prismatic subdivision of the idea, a simultaneous co-penetration of images."²³

By the time Dada exploded onto the world stage during the first World War, his poetry and theoretical and critical writings were already widely known, but the posthumous fame of *Un Coup de Dés* meant that these artists contended with it as though written by a contemporary. When in 1919 Francis Picabia drew up a mechanomorphic flowchart depicting

²⁰ Cited in Raymond Cooke, *Velimir Khlebnikov: A Critical Study*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 85. On Russian Futurism and Mallarmé, see Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, p. 160. In addition to the explicitly Mallarméan models of "transrational" language, in Russia the very concept of *faktura* as it was developed by polemicists such as David Burliuk had a foundation in their grasp of the modernist poetry of Mallarmé as a form of poetic materialism, as Maria Gough has argued, in "*Faktura: the Making of the Russian Avant-Garde*," *RES* n. 36 (Autumn 1999): p. 38. For Marinetti's translation of Mallarmé, see typed notes in the Getty, Marinetti "Versi e Prose, prima traduzione italiana," (Getty Box 1: Folder 42)

²¹ Gino Severini, "Symbolisme Plastique et Symbolisme Littéraire," in *Mercure de France*, n. 423 (February 1916): 467.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 468.

²³ The term "prismatic subdivision of the idea" is from Mallarmé's preface to *Un Coup de Dés*, OCI 391.

artistic and literary precursors as wires running to the bomb of the “Mouvement Dada,” Mallarmé was given pride of place (Figure 0.2). Confirming this view, Pierre de Massot, the writer and close friend to Duchamp and Picabia, wrote a genealogy of Dada titled *De Mallarmé à 391* in 1922, in which he affirmed Léon-Paul Fargue’s observation that, “Just as it’s impossible to philosophize after Kant as we had philosophized before Kant, it’s impossible to write verse after Mallarmé as we had written verse before Mallarmé.”²⁴ In 1914, André Breton, for his part, wrote, “Mallarmé reigns: no idolatry for me, but devotion to a revealed God.”²⁵ Indeed, when Louis Aragon, Breton, and Philippe Soupault founded their revue *Littérature* in 1919, they published poems by Mallarmé next to those by Isidore Ducasse (the Comte de Lautréamont) and their own early experiments.²⁶ By the eighteenth issue of March 1921, however, at the height of Paris Dada, *Littérature* published a numbered ranking of writers, artists, and historical figures according to the Dadaists, in which Mallarmé received only a middling average of 2.63 out of 20—dragged down by the -25 he received from Tristan Tzara (a score Tzara also gave to Baudelaire, Bataille, Bergson, and the Bible, to remain within the Bs).²⁷ Tzara, however, who will occupy us at length in Chapter Three, had affirmed in 1916 that the Dada “simultaneous poem” derived from the “typographical reform” of *Un Coup de*

²⁴ Pierre de Massot, *De Mallarmé à 391*, Saint-Raphaël: Au Bel Exemplaïre, 1922, p. 26

²⁵ Marguerite Bonnet, *André Breton. Naissance de l’aventure surréaliste*, Paris: José Corti, 1975, p. 32

²⁶ See Mallarmé, “Le château d’espérance,” *Littérature* N. 3 (May 1919): 1-3. Regarding André Breton, Michel Sanouillet notes, “Outwardly conforming to current fashion, professing his admiration for Apollinaire, he was secretly drawn more to Valéry and Mallarmé, his true writing masters, whom he had already applied himself to imitating.” Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2009, p. 56.

²⁷ *Littérature*, V. 3 N. 18 (March 1921): 5. Breton also, in 1923, refused to contribute to a “hommage” to the poet on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death in the *Cahiers idéalistes*, writing to its editor Edouard Dujardin, “At some point, we will discover Mallarmé, the work of Mallarmé that the person of Mallarmé still unveils, and it will be the *Coup de Dés* that reveals itself to be essential.” André Breton *Oeuvres complètes, I*, éd. M. Bonnet, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 454.

Dés.²⁸ By 1922, in typical Dada fashion, however, he raged that Mallarmé was a “false glory” and that “I consider myself robbed by Mallarmé, for in rereading poems that I had once loved, I can find today nothing but a mechanical syntactical process.”²⁹ Immediately relativizing his comment, Tzara noted, “I can’t help but add that I prefer bad writers to good ones and false glory to real glory” (TOCI 418).

The task of this dissertation will be to untangle a few threads in this history of alternating affirmations and disavowals, while remaining focused on the questions and problems shared by Mallarmé, the cubists, and Dadaists in their extraordinarily skeptical analyses of verbal and visual communication. If I have begun my investigation with cubism, rather than with Impressionism or Symbolism, it is in order to subject to analysis the conviction, shared by nearly all the figures in question, from Kahnweiler to Duchamp, that the core of the poet’s work only became legible after his death. From one point of view, the twentieth-century avant-gardes incarnated the future public to which the poet addressed his writing. And, yet, if they did so, I will argue, it was not through any successful or positive process of recovery, but by internalizing the principle of the “delay [*retard*]... in the Mallarméan sense of the word,” as Duchamp put it.³⁰

My first chapter develops the topos of the Mallarméan “delay” and its relation to Kahnweiler’s painting-as-writing thesis in the context of the development of Cubism from 1908 to 1910. This chapter focuses primarily on the work produced by Picasso in the summer of 1910 in the Spanish fishing village of Cadaqués, specifically on an understudied series of

²⁸ Tristan Tzara “Note pour les bourgeois,” *Cabaret Voltaire*, N. 1 (1916): pp. 6-7.

²⁹ Manuscript note in the Fonds Tzara, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, BLJD TZR 661.14. This text was later appended to an edition of the *Sept Manifestes Dada* from 1960 and included, in edited form, in his collected writings as “Réponse à une enquête,” TOCI 418.

³⁰ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, New York: Viking Press, 1971, p. 40.

etchings made to illustrate the book length prose poem *Saint Matorel* written by the artist's friend Max Jacob and published by Kahnweiler. It is in these prints that Picasso first worked through the spare graphic language that would define the paintings and drawings of this period, severing chiaroscuro from its modeling function and transforming the tightly structured faceting of the years prior into a permutational grid. Tracing the shifts between the states of the prints, and between the etchings, drawings, and paintings produced in Cadaqués, I demonstrate how Picasso maximized the mobility of form, allowing for the transposition of abstract pictorial units between different motifs, works, and mediums, without being oriented toward a single end, escaping the progressive temporality and closure sought by Kahnweiler.

While these works would seem to perfectly epitomize the key aspects of Kahnweiler's theory of cubism as a form of pictorial "writing," the dealer, infamously, considered them "unfinished" and to refuse to buy or sell them. While Cadaqués has been historicized, following Kahnweiler's terms, as a moment of "crisis" in the development of cubism, I argue, conversely, that it marks the limits of Kahnweiler's neo-Kantian and idealist model of language.³¹ This chapter reads Mallarmé against Kahnweiler in order to offer an alternate interpretation of the development of Picasso's cubism from *Bread and Fruit Dish*, 1908, to Cadaqués in 1910. I argue that the "destruction"³² of the codes of linguistic and visual representation sought by Mallarmé and Picasso achieved an elastic and mobile signifying structure in which meaning was kept perpetually open at the cost of "reducing everything to an equivalent of silence" or blankness (D 265). Toward an immanent critique of Kahnweiler's theory, I construct an

³¹ For the most recent, and best, assessment of the Cadaqués crisis, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Pablo Picasso: The Cadaqués Experiment," in *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, Ed. Leah Dickerman. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012, pp. 40-46.

³² Mallarmé proclaimed, "My work proceeded only by elimination... Destruction was my Béatrice," while Picasso stated, "A painting used to be a sum of additions. In my case, a painting is a sum of destructions. I make a painting, and then I destroy it." Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, pp. 348-349; Christian Zervos "Conversations avec Picasso" *Cahiers d'art*, n. 10 1935, p. 172.

alternative reading of Mallarmé's work for cubism and contrast Mallarmé's auto-destructive model of language with the Saussurean "semiology of Cubism" developed by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois.³³

Remaining within the ambit of Parisian Cubism, my second chapter turns to the invention of collage by Picasso and Braque in 1912. If Picasso's work from 1910 seemed to retreat from the very sociability of communication, the newspaper collages from two years later are materially built from the most pervasive and instrumental form of language: that of journalism. Scholarly opinion on these works has long been polarized: on the one hand, a social history of art emphasizes the appropriation of mass cultural fragments as a form of political communication drawn from the pages of the news and set against the autonomy of art; and, on the other, a semiological approach cast into doubt the very possibility of reading the newspapers for semantic content, insisting on their perpetual fluctuation between iconic, linguistic, and structural signification.³⁴ In order to intervene in these debates, this chapter focuses on the concepts of the "impersonal" and the "anonymous," which Picasso, Braque, and Kahnweiler each insisted were at the heart of the *papiers collés*. I argue that the paradigm of anonymity can most productively be conceived as a means to address three interrelated problems: first, the fraught question of what, how, or whether the viewer is to read in the *papiers collés*; second, the nature of Picasso's mode of selection and, by proxy, the reach of artistic intention in the newspapers; and, third, the link between the "impersonality" of cubism and that of reification in the social totality, which I analyze in relation to both the status of

³³ See Rosalind Krauss, "The Motivation of the Sign," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, pp. 261-286. Bois, "Kahnweiler's Lesson," in *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, pp. 65-99.

³⁴ While several important differences within these categories will be discussed in Chapter Two, for now it suffices to note that the social historical approach to the *papiers collés* was developed most prominently by Patricia Leighton, Thomas Crow, and Christine Poggi, while the semiological interpretation was pioneered by Krauss, Leo Steinberg and Bois.

journalistic language in early-twentieth-century France and the use of color as a locus for identification with industry, for both Picasso and Braque.

Each of these questions, I argue, can be addressed by tracing the genealogy of the cubist anonymous aesthetic back to Mallarmé's proposition that the depersonalization of the author was the price to pay for the achievement of a transindividual and multivalent mode of communication, set against the reification of language. This chapter draws on Mallarmé's notes for an unfinished dissertation on "the science of language" from 1869-70, in which he proposed a vision of the word as a negativizing force and of linguistic change as an impersonal and contingent dialectical process informed by his reading of Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic* (OCI 503-514).³⁵ Seeking to write poetry from this position of hyperbolic doubt, Mallarmé proclaimed, "I am now impersonal, and no longer the Stéphane you once knew—but the aptitude of the Spiritual Universe to reflect itself and to develop through what once was me."³⁶ The paradox at the heart of this chapter is the fact that Picasso and Braque, fourteen years after Mallarmé's death, also sought an "anonymous art... express[ing] itself through different individuals," but did so in the pages of the daily news.³⁷

Turning to the post-cubist valence of language in Dada, my third chapter focuses on two manuscript scores for Dada "simultaneous poems" held in the archives of Tristan Tzara, which have heretofore escaped scholarly inquiry. These undated manuscripts, composed by the

³⁵ Mallarmé, "Notes sur le langage," in *Oeuvres complètes*, pp. 849-851.

³⁶ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 242.

³⁷ Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso*, New York, 1964, p. 77. On this topic, my dissertation departs from the important work on Mallarmé and the *papiers collés* by Christine Poggi, who argued that Picasso's use of newspaper stood as "a self-conscious negation of Symbolist values." Poggi, "Mallarmé, Picasso, and the Newspaper as Commodity," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 1:1, Fall 1987, 133–151. Contrary to Poggi, my argument concurs with the recent scholarship of Anna Sigríður Arnar, who demonstrates Mallarmé's tactical interest in mass culture and the possibilities of the newspaper, see Anna Sigríður Arnar, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book and the Transformation of Print Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

founder of Zurich Dada, dispose linguistic fragments—phrases, words, vowels, and letters—into variable rows and columns, hermetically annotated with quasi-musical notations.

Unpublished in Tzara’s lifetime, these works blur the boundaries between the visual poem, the drawing, and the diagram. Through the analysis of primary sources, I argue that these curious notes are in fact scores for the performance of two “simultaneous poems” conceived by Tzara for large ensembles: *Froid Lumière* [sic] performed by six speakers at the Galerie Dada’s *Abend neuer Kunst* on April 28, 1917, and *La Fièvre du Mâle*, for twenty readers on April 9th, 1919, at the Eighth Dada Soirée at Zurich’s Sall zur Kaufleuten.

In an explanatory “*note pour les bourgeois*,” Tzara stated that the simultaneous poems multiplied the number of voices and synthesized several arts, but most importantly solicited each audience member to “fragment and intermingle” the performance with their own associations. Tzara affirmed that this strategy derived from both Mallarmé’s “typographic reform” and the cubist “transmutation of objects”—like a *papier collé* no longer constrained to the page.³⁸ Following Tzara, this chapter examines the relationship of Zurich Dada to the legacy of cubism, and to the contemporary development of choreographic notation, or “dance-script,” at Zurich’s Laban School by dancers including Suzanne Perrottet, Käthe Wulff, and Maya Chrusecz, whose role in Dada has been overlooked in most histories of the movement. It also considers the Dada event in relation to Mallarmé’s manuscript notes for *Le Livre*, an unrealized poetic ceremony conceived as a critique of Wagner’s total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) and meticulously planned to give itself over to chance. In hundreds of mysterious diagrams, calculations, scenographic or choreographic proposals, and spatialized linguistic fragments—now housed at Harvard’s Houghton Library—Mallarmé designed “a new and simultaneous method of reading” that would transcend poetry, drama, and religious ritual

³⁸ Tristan Tzara, “Note pour les bourgeois,” pp. 6-7.

in order to construct an atheistic and democratic ode to the “unconscious heart of Crowd,” which he defined as “the Figure that No One is” (D 112). This chapter, thus, will study the “deconstruction of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe puts it, from Mallarmé to Dada, which is to say, from its utopian nineteenth-century formulation to its confrontation with the nightmare of industrial warfare.³⁹

My concluding chapter focuses on the interrelated questions of chance, language, work, and money for Duchamp, centering on the *Monte Carlo Bond*, 1924, a work of art and financial document—a debt security to be precise—intended to fund his deployment of a martingale betting strategy to play roulette and “break the bank” in the casinos of Monte Carlo. Analyzing never-before-published correspondence sent by Duchamp to his brother Jacques Villon from Monte Carlo, in which the artist described roulette as “a form of office work,” this chapter reconstructs the circumstances around the bond’s creation and the status of gambling for the artist.⁴⁰ The *Bond*, I argue, not only represents a shift in Duchamp’s thinking about chance, but also evinces a disenchanting view of the artistic act as indistinguishable from the gambler’s compulsion, “a habit-forming drug” lacking any social value, as he later put it (DDS 182-183).

Duchamp, throughout his life, proclaimed the supreme importance of Mallarmé’s writing for his art and the poet’s place in his “ideal library”: “Mallarmé was a great figure. This is the direction in which art should turn.”⁴¹ This chapter charts Duchamp’s engagement with Mallarmé, stretching from his notes on *Un Coup de Dés* in 1915 (mentioned above) to the *Monte Carlo Bond*, in which the dice of Mallarmé’s ludic metaphor are no longer “cast into

³⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Mallarmé,” in *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, Trans. Felicia McCarren. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 63

⁴⁰ Letter from Marcel Duchamp to Jacques Villon from Monaco on June 16, 1925. Courtesy of the Marcel Duchamp Association, and with thanks to Antoine Monnier and Jacqueline Matisse-Monnier.

⁴¹ James Johnson Sweeney, “Eleven Europeans in America,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, v. 13, no. 4/5 (1946): p. 21.

eternal circumstances,” but into the commercial sites of the art and financial markets, and of the casino. This chapter ultimately analyzes the status of autonomy for Duchamp and Mallarmé, their shared conviction that aesthetic labor could not be wholly subsumed within the capitalist definition of work and its orientation toward the process of valorization. While Mallarmé sought to resist the transformation of language into currency in order to preserve the “gratuity” of art, from the vantage point of the early twentieth-century, Duchamp ambivalently associated the “unproductive labor” of the artist with that of the speculator or gambler. “As you can see,” he wrote to Francis Picabia from the roulette tables in Monte Carlo, “I haven’t quit being a painter: I’m drawing on chance now” (AM 144).

This dissertation, therefore, addresses the fact that the word became a primary object for modernist artists precisely as they received Mallarmé’s message about the lacunary status of language. In a contemporary moment pervaded by optimistic claims for the technocratic democratization of communication, this dissertation aims to recover the avant-garde’s skeptical emphasis on language’s ineradicable indeterminacy. This, I argue, was the contingent basis for the “total expansion of the letter,” as Mallarmé put it, into twentieth-century art (D 228).

Chapter One

Reading Lessons:

Picasso's Crisis in Cadaqués and Kahnweiler's Semiology

In the 1940s, while in hiding during the Nazi occupation of France, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler focused with renewed energy on his life's work of constructing a genealogy for cubism and, therefore, by logical extension, for "today's art" as whole—the origins of which, for the hardly-impartial art dealer and theorist, were identical (CE 219). During this period, Kahnweiler wrote an important yet overlooked essay entitled "Mallarmé and painting," illustrated with a portrait of the poet by Picasso.¹ Here, he proclaimed, "Modern art owes toward this poet a debt of gratitude equaled only by that owed to Paul Cézanne" (CE 221) It is well known, Kahnweiler proposed, that Picasso, Braque and Gris "found in Cézanne the example that allowed them to erect plastic architectures"; less recognized, he continued, was the fact that "It was their reading of Mallarmé that gave to the cubist painters the audacity to freely invent *signs* with the conviction that these signs *would become*, sooner or later, objects signified for viewers" (CE 219).

At the most basic level, Kahnweiler sought to demonstrate that the reputation for obscurity shared by the cubists and Mallarmé was equally ill deserved; in fact, he maintained, what appeared to many viewers or readers as a willfully distorted form of communication typical of the modern "school of unintelligibility" was paradoxically the result of their shared focus on the materiality and the structural "unity" of the aesthetic object (CE 219).² In their mutual analyses of the "laws" of representation, Kahnweiler

¹ 'Mallarmé et la peinture' first appeared in "Numéro Spécial: Stéphane Mallarmé," *Les Lettres*, (3e année): Paris, 1948, pp. 53-68, a special issue dedicated to Mallarmé, and was later collected in CE 214-221.

² This is how the editors of *Le Gaulois* referred to Mallarmé in his obituary, *Le Gaulois*, 10 sept 1898, p. 1.

asserted, Mallarmé and the cubists “tended toward clarity.” That such a purportedly “clear” and self-critical investigation into the means of aesthetic expression seemed to threaten (to their enemies as well as advocates) a severance between representation and reality, or a flagrant violation of the social norms of communication, was, without exaggeration, the problem to which Kahnweiler dedicated his life.

Toward this end, Kahnweiler developed an argument—expressed in his earliest writings of the 1910s, and expanded into a fully-fledged system in the 1940s—regarding the originary relation between painting and writing, in which Mallarmé was a key term.³ For Kahnweiler, citing Mallarmé, “Painting is a writing, has never been anything else, but has not always remembered this, has often ‘veiled its origins’” (CE 219).⁴ Not referring only to the words in the works, the meaning of “writing” in Kahnweiler’s system is stranger than has been supposed, in part due to the uneasy contradiction existing between his claim that cubism was a mode of self-critical analysis of the medium of painting, on the one hand, and, on the other, his assertion of an ontological co-penetration of painting and writing.⁵ If the “exigencies of rigid construction” inherited

³ As early as 1912, Kahnweiler told a journalist for the Parisian daily *Je sais tout*, “Oh! I know that *the reading [la lecture]* of these most recent Picassos and Braques is labourious.... It corresponds to nothing real, but look how it *signifies*.” Jacques de Gachons, ‘La peinture d’après-demain (?)’, *Je sais tout!*, 15 April 1912, pp. 349-356.

⁴ Kahnweiler is citing Mallarmé’s defense of Edouard Manet’s painting, which the poet argued did away with “certain procedures of painting, whose principal flaw is to veil the origins of this art made of ointments and colors.” (OCH 411).

⁵ Regarding Kahnweiler’s theory of language, Yve-Alain Bois wrote, “I have mentioned Kahnweiler’s idea, expressed unflinchingly in his texts, that cubism is a writing (implying, thus, a reading). Unfortunately, he extended this metaphor to all of painting (defined as ‘formative writing’), and in terms of an obsolete linguistic conception. Not only did he commit a substantial error in his estimation of nonalphabetic writing and of the possibility of a pure pictogram..., but again, as corollary, he stopped at an Adamic conception of language, in spite of his vivid understanding of the sign’s differential nature. We can only lament that he did not have access to Saussure, for the Genevan linguist’s theory would have allowed him to emerge from this imprisoning contradiction.” Bois, “Kahnweiler’s Lesson,” p. 94. Bois ends his essay with the important claim that “Kahnweiler’s linking of cubist painting and Mallarmé is itself a theoretical act that makes us

from Cézanne led the cubists to “invent new signs,” Kahnweiler asserted, “the conviction that these signs would be ‘read’ [*lus*] in the end, was thanks to Mallarmé” (CE 219). Kahnweiler thus identified a paradox: in their search for the fundamentals of painting, the cubists did not find themselves entrenched more firmly in their area of competence, but had discovered in the “veiled origin” of their medium a foundational indeterminacy. Indeed, the purpose of “writing” as a concept and of “Mallarmé” as an “influence” within Kahnweiler’s theory of cubism seemed to become most pressing at the moments when the passage from pictorial mark to meaning was attenuated, when a temporal and cognitive gap opened between the perception of a “new sign” and its comprehension. In Kahnweiler’s theoretical work, “Writing” and “Mallarmé” are almost always accompanied by the future conditional: these terms point to a delay in the interpretive process while affirming that the works “would be read in the end” or “*would become*, sooner or later, the objects signified for spectators” (CE 219).

For Kahnweiler, Mallarmé’s proposition that “it is not with ideas that one writes a poem, but with words,” could be adapted into a motto for cubism (CE 215)⁶:

What [the cubists] juxtaposed on their canvases were not bottles or trees, but colored forms. They recognized the ‘sign-function’ of these forms that would become objects only for the ‘reader’ of this writing. Painting is a writing... The faith in the incantatory power of words, the certitude that the artist is a creator, which animated Mallarmé, gave to the Cubists the courage to invent, in turn, *signs, creators of reality*. (CE 219)

pardon his dogmatic anathemas against abstract painting (for which even Picasso reproached him).” *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶ Mallarmé’s statement was supposedly directed to Degas. In an anecdote related by Ambroise Vollard, Degas had his revenge on an unsuspecting admirer when asked before one of his paintings, “‘Do I detect in this painting, monsieur Degas, the influence of Maeterlinck?’ ‘Monsieur,’ Degas responded, ‘blue comes out of a tube, not an inkwell.’” Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d’un marchand de tableaux*, Paris: A. Michel, 1937, p. 260.

At times, Kahnweiler suggested that the prolonged “gap” between the viewer’s perception of a “colored form” in a cubist painting and the mental reconstruction of the idea or image that it signified was due merely to a lack of initiation—a delay similar to the process of learning a new language.⁷ Kahnweiler’s painting-as-writing thesis, however, was bound to a more precarious model of temporality. “Writing,” for Kahnweiler, inscribed a prolonged time of apperception and shifted the burden of signification onto the viewer: the struggle of viewers to see anything at all in a cubist painting, he believed, could be overcome if they learned to translate non-mimetic pictorial signs into meaning via a complex cognitive and mnemonic process comparable to reading. Mallarmé played a tactical role for Kahnweiler, then, because of the way his poetry’s syntactical and semantic ambiguities delayed meaning extraction in order, as the poet put it, to engage “the intelligence of the reader, which puts things into play itself” (OCI 475).

For Kahnweiler, echoing a strain of Mallarmé criticism devoted to the paraphrase, the obscurity of a cubist painting, like a poem by Mallarmé, was merely *apparent*, and once one had deciphered its fragmented signs, the reality of the object as intended by the artist would shine through, illuminated by the synthesizing productivity of the viewer’s cognitive faculties. “The example of Mallarmé alone,” Kahnweiler wrote, “could give [Picasso] the assurance that ... the spectator would rediscover the complete object which it was his intention to represent” (JG 129). Indeed, noting that “few texts are more revelatory of the spiritual origins of modern art,” Kahnweiler ended his essay with a

⁷ Picasso seemed at times to affirm this view, as when he proposed to Marius Zayas, “The fact that for a long time cubism has not been understood and that even today there are people who cannot see anything in it, means nothing. I do not read English, an English book is a blank book to me. This does not mean that the English language does not exist, and why should I blame anybody else but myself if I cannot understand what I know nothing about?” See Marius de Zayas, ‘Picasso Speaks,’ *The Arts*, May 1923, 312–326.

citation from Mallarmé: “To evoke in a purposive shadow the muted object [*l’objet tu*], by allusive words, never direct, reducing each to the equivalent of silence, is an endeavor close to creation” (D 264; CE 220). While Kahnweiler marshalled this passage to support his theory of “reading” as the reconstruction of a stable signified through the viewer/reader’s mental engagement with the work of art, it was precisely this model of reading, with its implications of finality and its dependence on an ultimately naturalistic logic, that Mallarmé resisted most strenuously, as I will demonstrate.

This chapter takes up this set of problems proposed by the greatest early theoretician of cubism, and tests them against both the poetics of Mallarmé and the progression of Picasso’s cubism from 1908-1910. Its central case study, for this reason, will be the moment within cubism that put the greatest pressure on Kahnweiler’s system: the prints, drawings, and paintings produced during Picasso’s working vacation in Cadaqués, Spain, between June and September 1910. Cadaqués marks an almost unbearably fraught moment in the historiography of Cubism. The eleven extant paintings from this period reflect, so the story goes, a crisis in the development of cubism, as Picasso fragmented the depicted object to the brink of abstraction. In these works, such as *The Guitarist* (Figure 1.1), Picasso reduced the depiction of body, objects, and space to the barest of locational and directional cues: two complementary sets of angles mark crooks of elbows, and three horizontal lines render the strings or frets of the titular guitar, which cannot be made to line up with the tuning pegs that likewise float free of a headstock at upper right. Little more than the coincidence of two sets of parallel lines at a diagonal topped with a curve indicate the musician’s inclined head.

The unprecedented aridity of the paintings, which reduce drawing to an open latticework suspended vertiginously over minimally differentiated chromatic fields of vaporous ochre, grey, brown, and beige, has provided a convenient hinge-point in any number of narratives. Cadaqués stands, on the one hand, as an ill-advised, but perhaps necessary, razing of the ground before cubism found its stylistic footing, or, on the other hand, as the birth pang of the new non-representational aesthetic paradigm, from the consequences of which its creator would ultimately shrink.⁸ These complementary teleologies, which both render Cadaqués as a failure (whether due to an excess of negativity or of timidity), were set in motion almost as soon as Picasso returned to Paris that fall, as Kahnweiler refused to buy most of his new works, considering them “unfinished.”

This chapter attempts to rethink the status of the Cadaqués works by centering on a series of etchings that Picasso produced that summer to illustrate the book length prose poem *Saint Matorel* written by his friend Max Jacob and published by Kahnweiler. In these prints, as Pierre Daix has suggested, Picasso first explored the “systematic discontinuity of the contour,” which was the “ransom to be paid for the unity of the pictorial language” (DR 81). Tracing the transposition of pictorial elements between prints, paintings, and drawings, I will propose that the *Saint Matorel* etchings enact forms of process and seriality that are irreconcilable to the linear sequence of preparatory and

⁸ These poles are represented, on the one hand, by Kahnweiler who rejected the Cadaqués works as “unfinished” and, on the other, by Piet Mondrian, who felt that the premises of abstraction could be derived by following the road not taken by Picasso. In the latter camp, Leah Dickerman’s “Inventing Abstraction” exhibition of 2012 rooted the epistemological groundwork for the global flourishing of abstraction in the 1910s and 1920s in Picasso’s work in Cadaqués. On the stakes of Cadaqués, and its relation to abstraction, see Yve-Alain Bois, “Pablo Picasso: The Cadaqués Experiment,” in *Inventing Abstraction*, p. 42

finished work, as to the progressive models of temporality endemic to Kahnweiler's conception of history.

Kahnweiler's claim that cubism "conjugated" the historical dyad of Mallarmé and Cézanne will supply the terms with which this chapter traces the development of Picasso's work from 1908 through to the summer of 1910.⁹ In doing so, I seek to provide a counter-narrative to Kahnweiler that accounts for the perilous balance—or tension—in Picasso's cubism between the analysis of the means of visual access to objecthood in painting (the Cézannean or phenomenological mode), and the incipient analysis of signification through the deployment of non-iconic signs (the Mallarméan or semiological mode).¹⁰ In Kahnweiler's view, cubism after Cadaqués reconciled the dialectical poles of Cézanne's "architectural" or "structural" conception of painting and Mallarmé's "incantatory" mode of "writing," to realize a form of representation in which the reader-viewer would be given access not merely to the appearance of a world passively seen, but to its "essence," actively constructed through the assimilative

⁹ Kahnweiler noted, "It is not until after 1907 that the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé exerted a profound action upon plastic art, an action conjugated [*qui se conjugue*] with that of Paul Cézanne's painting. The art of today owes much to these two men who never knew each other, and never had the chance to exchange ideas." CE 218

¹⁰ That cubism between 1909 and 1912 conjoined phenomenological and semiological investigation was emphasized by Benjamin Buchloh in the "Picasso and Braque" symposium at the Museum of Modern Art in 1989. After Yve-Alain Bois' paper, Buchloh asked, "If we focus on the linguistic side of that neo-Kantian reading that Kahnweiler imposes on Picasso, what happens to the perceptual, phenomenological side that would culminate in the work of 1912? In your [Bois] semiological model, that side seems to receive surprisingly short shrift. Braque, according to your argument, is the one who remains outside of phenomenology and the structuralist model, and it seems that you're reducing Picasso's achievement to the structural-linguistic model in a way that is problematic, when, in fact, both models should be juxtaposed." Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, p. 214. In his introduction to the conference proceedings "Langage et modernité," Buchloh also described the transition from "the proclamation by Cézanne and cubism of a pure phenomenology of vision... toward a more complex conception of meaning and perceptual experience that recognizes the interdependence of the phenomenological and semiological dimensions of visual representation." Further, he asked, about cubism, "Is painting there operating for the last time as a credible phenomenological representation of the body and space, but at the same time being no more than a self-referential armature for the *mise-en-scène* of painting?" Benjamin Buchloh, "Introduction," *Langage et modernité*, Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau musée, 1991, pp. 9, 12. The present chapter is an attempt to answer this question.

processes of consciousness. Both terms, for Kahnweiler, implied that cubism no longer presented a mirror of the world, but “signs, creators of reality,” tasked with “determining the... world-image of the [artist’s] spiritual community” (JG 72). Measured against the world-historical reconciliation sought by Kahnweiler, which never did arrive, Cadaqués was branded with failure.

This chapter analyzes the theory of language developed by Mallarmé and the phenomenological reading of Cézanne (from Merleau-Ponty to Husserl) as a means to account for a mode of self-reflexive analysis of signification in cubism that does not and cannot give access to “the very structure of our visual perception,” as Kahnweiler had hoped (JG 152). Instead, I seek to preserve the negativity in modernism’s dream of “total autonomy, self-referring, self-sustaining, and self-justifying.” This dialectic was given poignant expression by Annette Michelson in 1969, who wrote,

It is, however, at precisely that moment which instigates the dissolution of the subject, a process crystallized and extended through Mallarmé and Cézanne into the art of our own day, it is when the painter rendering ‘seeing rather than things seen’ takes painting as his subject... that art’s aspiration shifts, expands, intensifies, tending, as in a moment of compensation, toward the most radical and all-encompassing of possible functions. Poetry, consenting through Mallarmé to be poetry only, proposes, simultaneously, to become the ‘orphanic explanation of the earth’ of a ‘world meant,’ moreover, ‘to end up in a book.’ The dissolution of the subject or figure, the contestation of art as Mimesis, of Realism itself, is grounded in the problematic consciousness of reality no longer assumed as pre-defined or pre-existent to the work of the imagination.¹¹

Borrowing “*charge de vue et non de visions*” from Mallarmé’s *Prose (pour des Esquisses)* (1885; OCI 29) and applying it to Cézanne, Michelson concludes that “as exploration of the conditions and terms of perception, art henceforth converges with

¹¹ Annette Michelson, “Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge,” *Artforum*, (February 1969): p. 58.

philosophy and science upon the problem of reality as known and knowable.”¹² But this compensatory expansion of art—as it took on the phenomenological and semiological tasks of analyzing its own conditions of possibility in visual perception or in language—led not to a stable “entrenchment into one’s field of competence,” as one story goes, or to the establishment of barriers between mediums, but was shadowed by loss. The “problems of pure structure” to which Cézanne, Mallarmé, and Picasso each turned, were just as liable to express a becoming-problematic of reality itself and the erosion of the ground securing art’s relation to it—a plunge into the void.¹³ To account for this dimension of modernism, I will propose, against Kahnweiler’s theory of writing, a model of cubism closer to Paul Valéry’s mallarméan dictum, “Language must be employed to produce that which renders mute, to express a mutism.”¹⁴

Cadaqués and *Saint Matorel*

The eleven paintings, five etchings, and numerous drawings produced between late June and the end of August 1910 in Cadaqués have been conscripted into a narrative of crisis ever since Kahnweiler wrote, “Little satisfied, even after weeks of arduous labor, he returned to Paris in the fall with his unfinished works” (RC 10). Yet, it may be useful to recall that if Picasso faced a “crisis” in the Summer of 1910, it could more credibly be rooted in the loss of support (financial and otherwise) occasioned by Kahnweiler’s reluctance to buy his most recent works—and therefore also to sell them to Picasso’s

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Michelson gives as an example the case of Flaubert, who, at the very moment that he dispensed with the hierarchy of subjects and recognized that any and every subject could be treated by an art having gained its autonomy, was drawn to the fantasy of a “book about nothing... a book with almost no subject. Or at least an almost invisible subject, if possible.” Michelson, p. 58.

¹⁴ Paul Valéry, “Le Beau est négatif,” *Oeuvres*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957, p. 375.

most dependable international collectors, such as Sergei Shchukin—than in any particularly acute anxiety about the direction of his work.¹⁵ (Besides, it could be countered that anxiety was precisely one of the more productive states for Picasso’s art, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, rather an indication of his failure in Cadaqués.¹⁶) Only Ambroise Vollard and Wilhelm Uhde seemed willing to buy Picasso’s hermetic recent works, and Picasso set about seeking to guarantee their future goodwill with portraits executed in the new manner.¹⁷ Even Vollard, however, seemed not to care much for the direction taken in spring and summer 1910, including only a few canvases from that year among the selection of mostly Blue period paintings when he put together an exhibition of Picasso’s work at his gallery in on the Rue Lafitte in December: he reportedly confessed to Max Jacob upon seeing the Cadaqués canvases, “He’s gone mad, your friend.”¹⁸

Picasso’s loss of financial backing, at the very moment when his painting seemed to sever the ties of resemblance to the phenomenal world, might go a long way toward

¹⁵ Pepe Karmel notes, “Spring 1910 seems to have been the first time since 1905 that Picasso experienced a financial crisis specifically because he could not sell his new works” Pepe Karmel, *Picasso and the Invention of Cubism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 76. Through his research in Kahnweiler’s financial documents, Karmel informs us that of the eleven paintings that Kahnweiler bought from Picasso that Spring, only two were from 1910 and only one of these (DR cat. 334) was in the “open structure” mode that he would push to its limits in Cadaqués. Karmel also discusses the loss of support among long-time collectors such as Shchukin, Leo Stein, and Vollard; only Frank Haviland and Wilhelm Uhde seem to have supported the work of 1910. Karmel, p. 76

¹⁶ See Krauss’ discussion of the “reaction-formation” in her account of Picasso’s “neo-classicism,” as a sublimation of the dual threats of photography and abstraction in Krauss, “Picasso/Pastiche,” in *The Picasso Papers*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, pp. 89-212. Indeed, Picasso even noted that the question of anxiety informed his interest in Cézanne: “What forces our interest is Cézanne’s anxiety.” Zervos, “Conversation avec Picasso,” p. 173-78.

¹⁷ Although Pierre Daix dates the beginning of work on the Uhde portrait to the end of 1909 and the Vollard portrait to Winter 1909-10 (DR 253), Rubin more plausibly redates the beginning of work on the portraits to Spring 1910, in William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989, p. 365.

¹⁸ André Level, *Souvenirs d’un collectionneur*, Paris: AC Mazo, 1959, p. 28. Cited in Karmel, p. 77.

explaining why he accepted an offer from Kahnweiler that April to illustrate Max Jacob's book-length prose poem *Saint Matorel* with a few etchings.¹⁹ In no position to turn down a job, Picasso nevertheless seems not to have much looked forward to the project for a number of reasons: beside the fact that printmaking had not been a central concern for him up to that point and the possibility that he was either being offered charity or being used, he was also being asked to take up somebody else's unfinished business. André Derain had been Kahnweiler's first pick for the illustrations, as he sought to follow up the success of their collaboration on Guillaume Apollinaire's *Enchanteur Pourrissant* (1909), the inaugural publishing venture of the young "Henry Kahnweiler." But the Fauvist ultimately declined after reading Jacob's fantastical narrative of Victor Matorel, a Parisian subway employee who joins a convent under the name Frère Manassé, has prolonged dialogues with Satan, and is sainted. Faced with this burlesque story, Derain wrote to Kahnweiler, "As for the manuscript, it's impossible for me to do anything whatsoever with this... [It is] a great poem that would infallibly ridicule any attempt at illustration. The book is so paradoxical and disconcerting that it would make any illustrator look like a dreary caricaturist."²⁰ By the end of April, it seems that Picasso had agreed to take over the task—it's unclear if he ever read the book—as we know from an ecstatic letter from Jacob to Kahnweiler: "Are you serious about Picasso's illustrations? Picasso would help the success of the book, very favorable for our future enterprises."²¹

¹⁹ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso, Vol II: 1907-1917, the Painter of Modern Life* New York: Random House, 1996, p. 159

²⁰ Cited in Hélène Seckel, *Max Jacob et Picasso*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, pp. 76. See also Richardson, p. 159. Derain, in fact, was also in Cadaqués during the Summer of 1910, see Edward Fry, *Cubism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, p. 21.

²¹ Seckel, p. 77.

On June 26th, 1910, Picasso went to Cadaqués and, while unburdened by the demands that Jacob's text would present to any literal-minded illustrator, he seems to have begun work on the etchings only grudgingly. A month passed before Picasso wrote to Kahnweiler that he was set to start work on the etchings "one of these days."²² Kahnweiler immediately passed the admittedly meager news to Jacob, who was overjoyed and responded, "Picasso's silence led me to believe that he was annoyed, that he was grumbling at both Matorels, myself and the other one."²³ Kahnweiler rushed out a promotional leaflet listing a release date of December 15th, complete with a text by Jacob featuring a mostly invented autobiography and a few words about Picasso: "The secret charm of his austere art has already impressed the *amateurs*. Returning pictorial art to the ancient laws of grand aesthetic after it was lost to the mere prettiness of *japonerie*, subjecting painting to the rigors of a simple and complex composition, rediscovering reality only through style and finding it truer, such is the model work of this artist."²⁴

Kahnweiler sent Picasso the prospectus, and the response indicates the degree to which he had begun to seriously occupy himself with the project, and also the evident

²² Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 367. Picasso was perhaps encouraged by the time that he and Fernande Olivier were spending with his friend, the print-maker Ramon Pichot, who lived near where they were staying. Richardson, p. 159

²³ Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 367; Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, Paris: Le Centre, 1984, p. 103. It does seem that there had been some conflict between the poet and Picasso, judging from a letter Jacob wrote to Marcel Olin from that Summer, "Il y a un grand événement sur la Butte, j'ai vendu les dessins de Picasso: tout le monde me blâme: il fallait manger et puis, tu sais ce que Picasso a été contre moi toute sa vie... On ne sait pas ce que ce geste m'a coûté de peines, tout mérité qu'il fût. En somme, le maître ne mérite pas plus de délicatesse: margaritas ante porcos. Je ne vois ni Apollinaire ni Salmon. Apollinaire va être furieux de l'édition de mon livre par un éditeur—celui de l'Enchanteur pourrissant—qui semblait ne devoir appartenir qu'à lui—Salmon louchera. Picasso rage de ne m'avoir pas illustré et surtout de ce que je me sois vengé si cruellement (la vente des dessins) de son indifférence hautaine." Cited in Seckel, p. 77

²⁴ Seckel, p. 78

annoyance that he felt toward it. Writing to Kahnweiler in his brusque and broken French, Picasso worried about the book's design and how his prints would appear:

I have just received your announcement of Saint Matorel, and we have to talk[.] Will the paper of the announcement be the format of the paper for the book? There is too much margin and the characters are too small it makes a small black square in the middle of that awful page. That's my impression. Tell me exactly the dimensions of the page (and of the book) and tell me if you also think the characters are too small. I'm set up here and have started to work.²⁵

Kahnweiler asked Picasso to send a description of his ideal format, mentioning that he showed it to Braque who "finds the characters quite lovely and, like me, thinks it's not too small." Picasso mailed Kahnweiler back the prospectus, covered with notations about the dimensions and typography, and a pen and ink drawing indicating the sort of work to be expected, and the presence on the page that he wanted for it (Figure 1.2). We have no record of Kahnweiler's response to the curious document he received in the mail, but it is safe to say that it arrived like a dispatch from another world, compared not only to the woodcuts he might have expected from Derain, but even when stacked up to the works by Picasso that Kahnweiler had been refusing to buy in the previous months.

The sketch evinced the near-full array of tactics that would come to define the Cadaqués period: the "systematic discontinuity of contour" (to cite Pierre Daix's expression again), chiaroscuro reduced to horizontal scribbles that don't quite qualify as hatching let alone fulfill their function as modeling, the interpenetration of figure with its ground, the simplification of all linear coincidence to the right angle or schematic curve, and finally only the faintest residuum of bodily reference, drained of resemblance, let alone of access to psychological interiority. Kahnweiler likely received the prospectus not long after the newest issue of *Le livre et l'image*, which dutifully reported the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79

forthcoming publication under the headline “l’Éditeur des ‘Ratés’ du Dessin” [“The Editor of the ‘Failures’ of Drawing”] and speculated, “M Kahnweiler seems to want to become the editor... who specializes in illustrating the work of good poets with the extravagant products of failures and *pasticheurs*.... [For *Saint Matorel*] Picasso executed etchings in which, as is his wont, he will no doubt *pastiche*—a new artist recklessly taking advantage of goodwill that he has not yet earned.”²⁶ The success of the book, it must have seemed to Kahnweiler, was far from secure.

The four etchings that Picasso produced for *Saint Matorel* in Cadaqués—putting the finishing touches on them upon his return to Paris in September—are of a part with the graphic language of the previous months, and in fact push it to the point of challenging the very legibility of the figure or motif itself.²⁷ Indeed, as Daix has argued, “the piercing of the closed form appears to have been first realized in the etchings for *Saint Matorel*” (DR 81). This seems to have concerned Kahnweiler a great deal. To Vincenc Kramár, the important Czech art historian and early supporter of Cubism, who bought a copy of *Saint Matorel* on Hollande paper, Kahnweiler wrote in a letter of February 16, 1911, “Being very difficult to read [*une lecture très difficile*] if one is not very familiar with Picasso’s art, I’ll provide a few words of description.”²⁸ The first, entitled *Mlle Léonie (Standing Figure)* (Figure 1.3) “is a nude woman, standing with her legs crossed.” The second, which presented the most severe roadblocks to cognition, *La*

²⁶ J. Grand-Cartaret, “L’Éditeur des ‘ratés’ du dessin,” *Le Livre et l’Image: Revue documentaire illustré mensuelle*, (July 4 1910): p. 99 Another notice ran in *Pan*, qualifying Jacob as a friend of the publication, see *Pan*, 3e année, n. 9 (Sept-Oct 1910), p. 565.

²⁷ Brigitte Baer and Bernhard Geiser, *Picasso, peintre-graveur*, Berne: Editions Kornfeld, 1986, p. 58.

²⁸ Jana Claverie, *Vincenc Kramar: Un théoricien et collectionneur du cubisme à Prague*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002, p. 327. It also should be pointed out that Kahnweiler’s use of the expression “*une lecture très difficile*” supports the authenticity of the expressions ascribed to him in the *Je sais tout* interview, where he notes that “*la lecture... est laborieuse*.” See note above.

Table, (Figure 1.4) is a still life, Kahnweiler informed Kramar, with “a stemmed glass, a rocking ink blotter [*tampon-buvarde*], a photograph in a frame, papers, books.” The third, *Mlle Léonie sur une chaise longue*, (Figure 1.5) depicts “a nude woman seated on a chaise longue,” and finally, “the fourth shows the convent’s garden, enclosed by walls. In this garden are a palm tree and a basin. Basically the convent, whose first floor backs onto a loggia, the church, and its bell tower” (Figure 1.6).²⁹

We shall return to Kahnweiler’s description of the “reading” problems of Cadaqués, which cuts to the core of his theory of cubism. Yet, if Kahnweiler’s anxious enumeration of the objects concealed within the prints—to a buyer who was quite capable of looking at art without guardrails—has a comical aspect to it, as though aesthetic understanding hinged upon the accurate cataloguing of things, he was clearly convinced that faced with the prints of *Saint Matorel*, even an experienced and sophisticated viewer needed a supplement in the form of the objects’ *names* so that they might see (or “read”) the contents of the image.³⁰ Kramar, for his part, later noted of the most hermetic of Picasso’s canvases, “Each element of the object, of a concrete or constructive signification, gains its autonomy to become a material that the artist can freely dispose within the limits of the laws governing the canvas. These elements consist of lines and *plans*, light, color, and different qualities of matter, smooth, rough, dry,

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Kramár’s understanding of these works, conversely, is far less concerned with the reconstruction of the “object,” and he criticizes Kahnweiler for his use of the term “distortion,” in that “Le terme même ‘déformation’ indique en effet clairement que les formes altérées, même fragmentaires, étaient des formes naturelles et, partant, closes, que le Picasso de ces années continuait donc à faire jouer la lumière à la surface des choses, qu’il ne s’était pas encore libéré de l’illusionnisme, malgré le renoncement à la perspective centrale et à l’éclairage unifié.” Kramár, *Le Cubisme*, Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2002, p. 18.

etc.”³¹ Kramar’s description of the autonomy and mobility of abstract pictorial structure gets us closer to the extraordinary productivity evident in the transpositions between prints, drawings, and paintings of Cadaqués, and further to the processes of erasure and defacement, addition and transposition, at play between different states of these prints.³²

Mlle Léonie dans une chaise longue (Figure 1.5) seems to have been the most labored over of the prints produced for *Saint Matorel*, judging from the multiple states preserved by Picasso, and the sheer pictorial distance they cover. The final state printed upon his return to Paris in September presents a body overwhelmed by an excessive buildup of sharply jutting triangular ridges, half-moon volutes, and patches of hatching less describing the fall of light than pooling into corners of the grid’s irregular understructure.³³ Even more striking perhaps is the accumulation of *taches* across the surface of the print, as though the plate itself were marred, stained, corroded. Undermining the distinction between the intentional mark and the error, these blotches built up over the course of the multiple states as though Picasso sought to preserve the traces of the most provisional and degraded features of his medium.

The figure—despite the title, it seems premature to assign a gender identity—is a study in the coexistence of mutually contradictory cues, intensified rather than corrected in subsequent states. In the first two states (Figure 1.7), “Léonie” is a standing figure with

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³² Annie Bourneuf, in a valuable article on Picasso as printmaker writes, “It seems that this possibility of serial transformation through a number of intermediate states, each of which may be preserved by a proof, was one of the medium’s most important capacities for Picasso, a capacity that must be understood as at once technical and historical.” See Bourneuf, “Picasso, Braque, and the Uses of the print, 1910-1912,” in *Picasso and Braque: The Cubist Experiment*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 79. The most significant treatment of Picasso’s “seriality,” in the context of the portraits of Fernande Olivier, is Jeffrey Weiss, “Fleeting and Fixed: Picasso’s Fernandes,” in *Picasso: The Cubist Portraits of Fernande Olivier*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 1-50.

³³ For invaluable information regarding the dating of these prints, see Geiser-Baer, *Picasso Peintre-graveur*, p. 60-62.

a wide parallelogram of a head and two boxy feet extending from either side of a roughly bilaterally symmetrical vertical axis. In the transition to the published state, however, Picasso effaced or defaced the figure's head, dropping her right shoulder to an incline and lengthening the neck to emphasize its bi-directional torsion, while filling the crook between the upper-arm and forearm with dense hatching. Most dramatically, however, the figure has been summarily transposed to a reclining or seated position on the least *longue* of chaise longues. The chaise's impossibly shallow space—and its effects on the perception of the figure's orientation—is constituted by the mere addition of an obtuse angle over the right shoulder, with the thin curved line demarcating the pillow of a head- or arm-rest, and a curved plane with three visible legs at bottom-left. The effect seems related to an opposite movement, the verticalization of supine figures that Leo Steinberg traced in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and *The Dryad*, for example.³⁴ Unlike these works, in which the barest subtractions sufficed to produce a radical shift in orientation, in *Mlle Léonie*, the chaise roots the figure in the ghost of a habitable space. The almost cancerous proliferation of bodily planes also herald a subtle transformation to the figure's orientation, with the two curves at bottom-center marking the buttocks on the edge of the chaise, producing an extreme serpentine pose—an impossible splaying toward vision that is evident in sketches from that spring, but which also occupied Picasso from *The Bather*, 1908 (DR cat. 239) all the way to the Algerian Women of the 1950s.³⁵ This supplements

³⁴ The dramatic effects of the addition and removal of the figure's corporeal lodging are evident in the "upshot of power" that Leo Steinberg sees achieved in the *Dryad*, spring-autumn 1908, where Picasso effaced the high chair in which his figure was seated, propelling her *pictorially* forward, almost flush with the canvas, and depositing her in the no-space of a jungle or forest (where the upper portion of the canvas frames her head just as the backrest of a chair had done in the preparatory sketch, the bottom portion fades out into indeterminacy). See Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel," *October*, V. 44 (Spring 1988): pp. 28-34.

the sense of visual alternation between vertical stance and nominally horizontal repose with the impression of a figure forced into an arabesque with feet rooted firmly on the ground, and framed by the two sharp triangular armrests on either side—a figure wound like a spring.

The *chaise longue* or armchair was a favored conceit of Picasso's from the previous years, and was still so in Spring 1910—evident in a painting bought by Kramar, *Femme sur un fauteuil* (Figure 1.8) (DR cat. 344) from earlier that Spring, but also in *Woman Sewing* (DR cat. 331), *Femme Nu assise dans un fauteuil* (DR cat. 332), *Femme assise dans un fauteuil* (DR cat. 333), and so on.³⁶ In each of these works, the armchair or chaise functions as an internal division, a formal mechanism to at once frame the figure from the surrounding environment and to anchor her in a space that is progressively dissipating. Indeed, its increasing presence in Picasso's work of this period matches the collapse between figure and ground effected by the drainage of color, the elimination of “naturalistic” light from a unitary source, the restricted linear vocabulary of angular ridges and planes, and the displacement of chiaroscuro. The contiguity of figure and ground achieved in the 1908-09 paintings of *Fernande* and the landscapes at Horta (to be discussed below) lent greater “architectural” solidity to both—as if the painting were conceived as a total structure of reversible cubes and wedges—but by Spring 1910 the result of this contiguity had reversed, threatening to dissolve rather than secure the

³⁵ For the sketches see, Christian Zervos, *Pablo Picasso, v. II, pt 2*, Paris: Cahiers d'Art, 1932-1978, p. 723. See also DR cat 353. The device also recalls Braque's *Grand Nu*, 1907-8. On the topic of Picasso's splaying of the side of the body that should be hidden from sight—and of the hiatus that Cubism represents in Picasso's preoccupation with this fantasy of “total access” to the body, see especially the section entitled “What About Cubism,” in Leo Steinberg, “The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large,” in *Other Criteria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 154-173.

³⁶ In fact, between Winter 1909 and the Summer in Cadaqués, Picasso paints a number of women in sofas including but not limited to, DR cats. 329, 331, 332, 333, 340, 341, 342, 343, and 345.

figure's integrity.³⁷ By the winter of 1909-10, in *Woman Sewing* (DR cat. 331) for example, the armchair acts as an internal echo of the framing edge of the canvas, a means to consolidate pictorial weight and attention in the vicinity of the figure, a lifeboat as the background collapses into near-total dissipation—an effect compounded as the chair's top-left corner reverberates around the figure's head.

Woman in an Armchair from Spring 1910 (Figure 1.8), “one of Picasso's most important paintings,” Kahnweiler told Kramar (after selling it to him), is very close to the *Mlle Léonie dans une chaise longue* print, especially in their near-identical poses, with implied left elbows resting on the chaise's headrest to raise the left shoulder and tilt the neck, and hands clasped across the chest.³⁸ No longer acting as a pictorial analogue of the framing edge, the chair rotates back into obliquity, matched by the figure's twist away from hieratic frontality. In this painting, Picasso's goal of establishing a connective tissue between center and periphery (between figure and ground), one which would nevertheless root the painting's center of gravity in the human body, came under unprecedented strain. Indeed, the fading out at the edges—beyond the suturing work of the facets and the pyramidal Gestalt of the figure and chair—seems to inaugurate the “problematic relation of forms in Cubist paintings to the framing edge,” as Michael Fried would describe it, that would dominate the next few years' production.³⁹ One of the

³⁷ Karmel might concur, as he writes, “Where the faceting of Picasso's 1908-09 canvases created a consistent pictorial texture, unifying figure and ground, the materialization of negative space in his 1910 pictures has no such unifying effect.” Karmel, p. 76.

³⁸ Claverie, p. 327

³⁹ Fried, *Three American Painters*, p. 253. See Harry Cooper's lucid meditation on this question in relation to Braque's work in Cooper, “Braque's Ovals,” *Picasso and Braque: The Cubist Experiment*, p. 39-59. The framing edge as pictorial problem seems to have reached a point of intensity in Braque's work somewhat earlier, for example in the Mandola floating in a nebulous void in the Tate Gallery's *Mandola*, from Winter 1909-1910.

attractions of working on the *Saint Matorel* prints for Picasso might have been a momentary loosening of painting's requirement to cover over the surface without remainder, and a reduction of aesthetic labor to line—therefore neutralizing the threat of negative space. What seemed to happen, instead, was that pictorial elements floated without determination, opening to each other and to the blank of the page.

Kahnweiler established his narrative about Cadaqués as early as 1914 in *The Object of the Aesthetic*, a philosophical and art historical treatise, the final chapter of which is a draft of *The Rise of Cubism*. There, he wrote in justifiably famous words that in Cadaqués Picasso “had taken the great step; he had pierced the closed form. A new tool had been forged for the achievement of a new purpose.”⁴⁰ Picasso had transformed the schematic sculptural modeling and continuous faceting of his 1908-09 works into an open, permutational grid, in which figures were no longer parceled up into coherent bodies but provisional and permeable frameworks continuous with the surrounding space. The “pierced form” leaves only the “primary qualities,” as Kahnweiler puts it in a Lockean mode, of “form and position”—pure being-there—with all “secondary characteristics” (such as “color and tactility”) wiped away (RC 12). Yet, if Picasso had dissolved the project of verisimilitude—seeming to abandon the painterly baggage of illusion and imitation since the Renaissance—he had not yet proposed a new system of representation to supercede it. In a by-now-familiar story, Kahnweiler noted that it was following this decisive, if precarious, advance that Picasso found a solution in Braque's “important discovery”: his introduction of a *trompe l'oeil* nail in *Violin and Palette* of 1909 (RC 10). Struck by Braque's “introduction of undistorted ‘real objects’ into the painting,” upon his return to Paris in Fall 1910, Picasso introduced iconic emblems into

⁴⁰ Kahnweiler, *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik*, München: H Moos, 1971, p. 69. RC 10.

his paintings, token mementoes of the depicted object's "secondary qualities," which act as a "stimulus which carries with it memory images" (RC 12).⁴¹ It was, then, in works such as the *Portrait of Kahnweiler*, that Cubism truly became a "sign-language," facilitating the interplay between the indexicality of the grid and the rudimentary iconic details to produce a kind of laboratory experiment for pictorial reading. "Combining the 'real' stimulus [the iconic tokens] and the scheme of forms [the open linear structure achieved in Cadaqués]," Kahnweiler argued, "the desired physical representation comes into being in the spectator's mind... The object, once recognized in the painting is 'seen' with a perspicacity of which no illusionistic art is capable" (RC 12). In the cognitive act now solicited from the viewer—who synthesizes *in their mind* the signs presented in the painting—cubism offered not a picture of the world, but world-making itself, and a summons to participate in the process.

To summarize, for Kahnweiler the "arduous labor" of Cadaqués remained unfinished in three separate ways: first, in the trivial sense that Picasso abandoned the canvases before they were fully baked, with the *non-finito* reigning⁴²; second, in the historical sense that, no matter its "decisive advance," Cadaqués ultimately represented a transitional moment on the way to cubism's full maturity, achieved that Fall; and, third, that in the works of Cadaqués, the cognitive process that Kahnweiler termed "reading"

⁴¹ Kahnweiler's concept of the "memory-image" was in critical dialogue with Bergson, whose text *Matter and Memory* is cited in *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik*. The passage by Bergson in question is: "Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it. The memory-image, in its turn, partakes of the 'pure memory,' which it begins to materialize, and of the perception in which it tends to embody itself." Cited in Kahnweiler, *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik*, p. 24. See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 133.

⁴² Again, there is no evidence that Picasso felt this to be the case: he signed several of these works, and, judging from Karmel's research, cited above, it appears that he would have been perfectly happy to sell them to Kahnweiler.

stalled, as the viewer lacked both the necessary information to complete the “assimilation” and the stable ground upon which to “put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in one perception,” as Kahnweiler wrote, quoting Kant (RC 12).

It was precisely to resolve this final stage that the concept of “writing” and the name “Mallarmé” entered into Kahnweiler’s historical and conceptual schema. As early as 1914, Kahnweiler characterized the cubist cognitive process of painterly perception as a matter of language: “Seeing, or more precisely, reading [*das Lesen*] a painting is always a very complicated process.... It is insignificant for the ‘reading’ of the image whether the work is similar to nature or turns away from it, since the object ‘seen’ is not found on the canvas, but is produced by the one who looks.”⁴³ By the 1940s, this aesthetic temporality is strongly identified with Mallarmé’s poetry. Indeed, in Kahnweiler’s theoretical summa *Juan Gris*, written contemporaneously with the “Mallarmé et la peinture” essay, he wrote, citing Mallarmé’s essay “Crisis of Verse,” “The example of Mallarmé alone, could give [the Cubist painter] the assurance that others would share his conviction, that the spectator would rediscover the complete object which it was his intention to represent, although transported to a higher plane as *‘idée même et suave’*” (JG 129). The works of Cadaqués, as I have demonstrated, fell under the threshold of this model of reading as a process of reconstructing the stable object of the painter’s intention in the mind of the viewer. Nevertheless, I will argue that the model of writing developed by Mallarmé, and expressed with epochal clarity in the very text that Kahnweiler cited, provided a definition of writing that is apposite for Cadaqués, one that proposed the transposition of objects into their own disappearance.

⁴³ Kahnweiler, *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik*, p. 26.

Mallarmé: Transposition and Structure

While it took Kahnweiler until the 1940s to argue for Mallarmé's centrality to the formulation of cubism, his poetry was a topic of sustained debate and discussion in the intellectual and social world in which Picasso lived, largely made up of poets.⁴⁴ Indeed, due to the sheer pervasiveness of Mallarmé's poetry in European literary and artistic avant-gardes of these years, and the impossibility of proving the depth of Picasso's knowledge of this or that poem by Mallarmé in the years in question, a brief summary will suffice.⁴⁵ Picasso's time in Barcelona was spent in the cafés like *Els Quatre Gats*, dominated by varieties of Symbolist and post-Symbolist poetry, and by the time he settled in Paris in 1904 the poetry of Mallarmé and his generation was recited regularly.⁴⁶ Indeed, when tasked with organizing an event devoted to "the New Phalanx" of poets at the 1908 Salon des Indépendants, Apollinaire and his co-organizers titled it "*l'Après-midi des poètes*" "in venerative allusion to our master, Stéphane Mallarmé," whose poems were read alongside those of Jacob, André Salmon, and Marinetti.⁴⁷ It is clear that Picasso was invested in French poetry, despite the limitations of his French: in 1905, he

⁴⁴ Jean-François Chevrier suggests that the reason for the delay in Kahnweiler's study of Mallarmé's importance for cubism can be explained by the fact that, in the 1910s, "His main concern was to disengage cubism from literature, in particular from symbolism and from the mediation of Apollinaire, and to re-center it on the works of its two inventors, Picasso and Braque." Chevrier, *l'Action restreinte*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Readers interested in a more exhaustive treatment of the evidence can refer to chapters 3 and 4 of Linda Goddard, *Aesthetic Rivalries: Word and Image in France, 1880-1926*, New York: Peter Lang, 2012, pp. 113-195

⁴⁶ Mallarmé was translated into Spanish quite early, and made an impression in the small literary world of Barcelona, where it seems, however, that Verlaine was most important. See the bibliography of Mallarmé in the Hispanic world in Alfonso Reyes, *Mallarmé entre nosotros*, México, Ediciones Tezontle, 1955. See also Michael P. Predmore, "Mallarmé's Hispanic Heirs," in *Mallarmé in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert Greer Cohn. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1998, pp. 221-234.

⁴⁷ Apollinaire, V.-E. Michelet, and P.N. Roinard, *L'Après-midi des poètes: La Poésie Symboliste: Trois entretiens sur la période héroïque*. Paris: L'Édition, 1908, p. 7. In his introduction, Roinard emphasizes Mallarmé's role in mentoring successive generations of young poets. For Apollinaire's correspondence with Roinard about this event, see Apollinaire, *Correspondance avec les artistes*, Paris: Gallimard, 2009, p. 35.

carefully copied out of Verlaine's poem "Cortège" and according to Maurice Raynal, among the books that littered Picasso's studio in 1906 were volumes by Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, classed indifferently next to issues of *Fantômas*.⁴⁸ And, many years later, as if to authorize Kahnweiler's assertion that Mallarmé was equaled only by Cézanne in his impact on cubism, Picasso contributed one of the three portraits of Mallarmé he executed in the mid-1940s to illustrate Kahnweiler's essay "Mallarmé et la peinture," when it was first published in 1948 (Figure 1.9).⁴⁹

However, the quest to establish a linear model of influence from the poet's ideas to the cubists' work is perhaps beside the point because, despite differences in generation and in medium, the Mallarmé reception and the cubism reception did not occur in neatly sequential periods, but were entangled and largely contemporaneous. It is possibly this entwinement that Jacob intended to reference in a cryptic lecture note: "Cubism: pictorial arrangement and matter—poetic matter: Mallarmé... a ball of string."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Maurice Raynal, *Picasso*, Paris: G. Crès, 1922, p. 52-53. The culture of poetry recital in Picasso's circle is vividly captured by Wilhelm Uhde, who describes meeting Picasso by chance in Montmartre in 1905 shortly after having bought *Le Tub* "by a young unknown" for 10 francs from a mattress-maker: "In the smoky basement young artists met up from the rue Gabrielle and la place Ravignan. Someone was reading Verlaine. I ordered a bottle of wine for the big table in the middle. I learned, over the course of the night, that the young man who painted the work I just bought was named Picasso and that he was sitting to my right." Wilhelm Uhde, *Picasso et la tradition française*, Paris: Éditions des quatrechemins, 1928, p. 40. For Picasso's poem, see Picasso, "n. 37 r" in Brigitte Léal, *Carnets: Catalogue des dessins, v. 1*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, c1996, p. 88.

⁴⁹ See "Numéro Spécial: Stéphane Mallarmé," *Les Lettres*, (3e année): Paris, 1948, pp. 53. One of these three portraits, dated 1945, is sketched next to Picasso's transcription of Mallarmé's "*Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire*." On the three portraits of Mallarmé, see Marshall C. Olds, "Future Mallarmé (Present Picasso): Portraiture and Self-Portraiture in Poetry and Art," *Romance Quarterly* v. 45, n. 3 (Summer 1998): pp. 168-177.

⁵⁰ Jacob also named Royère and Valéry as part of the poetic lineage of Mallarmé. The lecture was entitled "De Bonnard à Picasso" and given at the Société des amis du musée des Beaux-arts de Nantes, 23 janvier 1937. See Seckel, p. 252. The depth of "Mallarméism" in Picasso's circle is evinced by Jacob's letter to Picasso on April 7th, 1917, where he notes, "Cocteau publie un poème dans *Femina*. Mallarmé l'a fait avant lui," referring to the poet's notorious fashion magazine *La Dernière Mode*, 1874. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 145. Though Jacob tended more toward Verlaine than Mallarmé, the very title of his first poetry collection pays

Perhaps the most immediate representative of the historical and aesthetic interconnectedness between Mallarmé and cubism was Vollard, whose portrait Picasso was painting in spring 1910. Work for the portrait “dragged on for months” according to Fernande Olivier, and the dealer sat for Picasso during interminable sessions as the painter sought to secure his support to hedge against Kahnweiler’s anxiety.⁵¹ A legendary *causeur*, one can speculate that Vollard might have steered the conversation toward the topic of Mallarmé with his captive audience of the young and increasingly illegible Spanish artist. Vollard was not only familiar with Mallarmé’s poetry, but evidently delighted in telling stories of Mallarmé’s audacious “incomprehensibility.”⁵² Furthermore, he had known the poet personally and collaborated with him in the last few years of his life to publish the first editions of *Un Coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le Hasard*, with illustrations by Odilon Redon, and of *Hérodiade*. Both projects were interrupted by Mallarmé’s death and permanently shelved due to the dealer’s “deplorable tendency to put off everything until tomorrow,” as he put it.⁵³ In an unpublished letter recently acquired by the Musée départemental Stéphane Mallarmé, Vollard wrote to Mallarmé on December 14th 1896 to secure exclusive publication rights for the poem, writing, “I want to tell you right from the beginning that I would be prepared to spend

homage to the poet. In the theoretical introduction to *Cornet à Dés*, he writes, “the oeuvre of Mallarmé is the type of the situated work: if Mallarmé wasn’t so stilted and obscure, he would be one of the great classics.” Jacob, *Oeuvres*, Paris: Gallimard, 2012, p. 349

⁵¹ Fernande Olivier writes, “He started making Cubist portraits. He painted that of Uhde, who traded him a small Corot for it... Then he did Vollard’s and Kahnweiler’s. He worked on these portraits for a long time, above all on that of Vollard, which dragged on for months.” Fernande Olivier, *Souvenirs intimes: Écrits pour Picasso*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1988, pp. 244-45.

⁵² Vollard, for example, recalled, “Mallarmé, whose works pass for unintelligible, was a true charmer in conversation. The poet, when he received his intimates at his apartment of the rue de Rome always spoke standing up next to ‘his’ couch, in which no one would have dared to sit.” Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d’un marchand de tableaux*, p. 99. Additional discussions of Mallarmé can be found on pp. 99 and 250.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

anything necessary for this book to have the most beautiful edition in the world: the question to be discussed would be that of your honorarium—excuse this dealer’s term.”⁵⁴ Volland’s memoirs tell of the Didot publishing house refusing to print *Un Coup de Dés* in its final format and returning the proofs with the comment “A madman wrote this.”⁵⁵ If Volland had these words in mind when he told Max Jacob, upon seeing Picasso’s work from Cadaqués, “He’s gone mad, your friend,” it is difficult not to speculate that he might have discussed the poetry of Mallarmé with Picasso as he witnessed the vaporous dispersal to which his own body was being subjected in the artist’s portrait.⁵⁶ Indeed, Volland seems not to have been fond of the portrait himself, as he sold it in 1913.⁵⁷

To go beyond generalities about the shared incomprehensibility of Picasso’s work of 1910 and the poetry of Mallarmé, one can turn to Ardengo Soffici, who had lived in Paris since 1900 and who corresponded with Picasso and visited his studio in spring 1910.⁵⁸ Soffici defended Picasso’s most hermetic work of this period, which had caused former enthusiasts such as Serge Férat to jump ship (the latter wrote to Soffici in August

⁵⁴ The letters are held in the Musée départemental Stéphane Mallarmé in Vulaine-sur-Seine and were acquired in 2011. Volland told Mallarmé, “I discussed with M Redon the very great desire I have to publish something by you with illustrations by him. M Redon filled me with joy by telling me that you are not opposed.”

⁵⁵ Volland, *Souvenirs*, pp. 287-88. Volland claimed that after Mallarmé’s death, his son-in-law Edmond Bonniot suppressed the publication of *Hérodiade*, believing that it was unfinished and would harm his father-in-law’s legacy. Volland stated that he was still in the process of negotiating the publication of *Hérodiade* when Bonniot died in 1930, a fact that testifies to his dedication to Mallarmé’s work. *Ibid.*, p. 288

⁵⁶ Level, *Souvenirs d’un collectionneur*, p. 28. Cited in Karmel, p. 77

⁵⁷ Volland sold his portrait in 1913 to Ivan Morosov for 3000 francs. See, Rebecca Rabinow, *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007, p. 390.

⁵⁸ We know that Soffici visited Picasso’s studio at the Boulevard de Clichy on April 7th, 1910, See Seckel, p. 564. On Soffici’s subsequent “return to order,” his fascism, and its relation to these early years, see, Walter L Adamson, “Soffici and the Religion of Art,” in *Fascist Visions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 46-72. André Salmon, incidentally, insists that Jacob and Picasso rarely if ever attended the soirées at *La Plume*, André Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin*, v. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, p. 57

1910, that “[Picasso’s] latest portraits present such a decomposition.... For me it’s nothing but an aesthetic morgue”).⁵⁹ Perhaps to address such critiques, Soffici published an essay, “Picasso e Braque,” in *La Voce* in August 1911, in which he argued, like Kahnweiler, for the absolute schism between Cubism and what he calls the “panpoeticity” of the Impressionists, who proceed via the “the equalization of the diverse values of the visible universe.”⁶⁰ Picasso’s most recent work, conversely, “dissolved” the visual world into “emotive elements—lines, foreshortening, tonal nuances” and reconstructed them into “a hieroglyph for writing down (for those capable of reading it) a lyrically intuited truth.”⁶¹ It is on this basis that Soffici remarked that “Picasso’s method somewhat resembles the elliptical syntax and grammatical transpositions of Stéphane Mallarmé.”⁶² Soffici sent the essay to Picasso, and on September 12, 1911, Picasso wrote back to him, “It’s just now that I’ve found *La Voce*, where I’ve read your article with emotion.”⁶³

The terms with which Soffici described Mallarmé and Picasso are proof of his knowledge of the poet’s critical writings, for “transposition” and “syntax” formed a key dialectic for Mallarmé’s poetics. In the critical poem “Crisis of Verse,” published by *La revue blanche* and collected in *Divagations* (1897), which was widely known and cited in

⁵⁹ See Soffici, *Correspondance, 1903-1964*, Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 2013, p. 199

⁶⁰ See Soffici, “Picasso and Braque,” *La Voce*, 24 August 1911: 635-37. Translated in *A Cubism Reader*, eds. Antliff and Leighten, p. 129

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 136

⁶² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶³ Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 379.

cubist circles⁶⁴, Mallarmé proposed a model of poetry in which language, abandoning itself to “the musicality of everything,” would negate the premises of everyday communication, that contents itself “with the reality of things only commercially.” “This aim,” he wrote, “I call Transposition; Structure, another” (D 208). This dialectic, the latter term of which Soffici reduces to syntax (following Mallarmé’s own suggestion, as we shall see), in fact, functions as the motor of Mallarmé’s entire poetic practice. Further, the text was a key source for Kahnweiler’s interpretation of Mallarmé in the 1940s. After discussing the meaning of this opposition for Mallarmé, I will argue that a reading of Cadaqués against Kahnweiler hinges precisely on the difference between, on the one hand, “transposition” and “structure,” and, on the other hand, Kahnweiler’s motivating antitheses of “representation” and “structure.”

The difficult concept of “transposition” has received surprisingly little sustained analysis in the voluminous studies of Mallarmé, despite the poet’s own assertion of its centrality to his poetics: this, perhaps, is because he never ventured a precise definition of the term or discoursed on it at length. The closest he came was in “Crisis of verse,” where he asked, “What good is the marvel of transposing a fact of nature into its vibratory near-disappearance according to the play of language, however: if it is not, in the absence of the cumbersomeness of a near or concrete reminder, the pure notion?” (D 210). Mallarmé is describing a process whereby a “cumbersome” object in the world is given over to its own loss or “near-disappearance” by dint of its transposition into language. The object,

⁶⁴ Apollinaire, for example, cited “Crisis of Verse” in his review of the *Salon des Indépendants* from 1908. Defending the modernists, he writes, “Et si réellement, comme je le crois, quelques peintres ont manifesté mieux que des efforts vers la beauté, il n’est peut-être pas inutile d’appeler ici cette phrase de Mallarmé, belle de toute l’espérance qu’elle referme: ‘... Je ne vois effacement de rien qui ait été beau dans le passé.’” *La Revue des lettres et des arts*, 1 mai, 1908. See Apollinaire, *Chroniques d’Art*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p 110.

once spoken or written and subjected to the strictures of language's materiality, gains in "purity" as it loses its "nearness" and "concreteness." For the poet, who is as concerned with the sonic and graphic character of words as with their meaning, the achievement of a "pure" writing opens a vertiginous gap between the manipulation of language and the solidity of the object-world outside the text. Indeed, the poem threatens not only the disappearance of the referent but that of the writer's own subjectivity and personality: "The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet speaking, who yields the initiative to words, through the clash of their ordered inequalities" (D 208). Having set in motion the "clash" and "play" of words, the poet finds himself as though excluded from the process, peering in from outside.

Mallarmé follows these rather gnomic proclamations with an example, later cited by Kahnweiler: "I say: a flower! And, out of the oblivion where my voice relegates no contour, something other than any known calyx [*calices*] arises musically, the idea itself, suave, what is absent from every bouquet" (D 210). The word "*calices*" rendered in English as "bloom" by Barbara Johnson, carries a double meaning in French, signifying both a chalice and a *calyx*: the former could be a receptacle for flowers and the latter is the protective layer that encloses the petals in a bud and then cups them once the bloom emerges. Mallarmé points to the "oblivion" into which his voice cast the contour of the poetic flower simply by saying its name, playfully constructing an undecidable relationship between the bloom, its vegetal protection, and its man-made vase or chalice.

Further, this passage sets up a complex relay between the referent ("*une fleur*," the known calyx or material bloom), the signified ("*l'idée même et suave*"), and the signifier (the musical sound-image of the poet's "I say!"). Each exists, as it were, on a

separate track of material existence: the graphic or phonic substance of the signifier “flower” is materially distinct from any angiosperm, while the idea, as the product of consciousness, can no more be located *inside* the flower than reduced to the exteriority of the signifier. And yet, through the simple act of pronouncing a name, they become mutually entangled. Further, and most profoundly, the poet who seeks language in its “essential” state—wrenched from the false immediacy of instrumental communication—finds that the traces of entanglement between referent, signifier, and signified, are like holes bored into each by the other. That is to say, to speak or to write is in some way to destroy the thing, to find within it a lack—“what is absent from every bouquet”—and to transpose it into a structured system of relations with perilously little access to the phenomenal world. This play of absences is the reality of language that we must forget in order to communicate effectively in our lives as social agents, but which “recovers in the Poet’s hands, of necessity in an art devoted to fictions, its virtuality. (D 211). Jean-Pierre Richard sums up this line of Mallarméan thinking in this way: “To annihilate an object, it suffices to name it.”⁶⁵

But how did this theoretical system of transposition and structure function in Mallarmé’s poetic practice? His reference in “Crisis of verse” to the “flower” as tripartite compound (sound/mark, idea, phenomenal bloom) subject to “vibratory disappearance” in language tacitly refers to his poem *Prose (Pour des Esseintes)*, first published in January 1885 in *La Revue Indépendante* and described by Albert Thibaudet in 1912 as “the quintessence of unintelligibility.”⁶⁶ The poem ostensibly describes a passage through

⁶⁵ Jean-Pierre Richard, *l’Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, p. 379

⁶⁶ Alfred Thibaudet, *La poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Paris, Rivière, 1912, p. 403. The poem’s title ironically misidentifies its genre—it is written in the octosyllabic meter favored by Medieval French

a landscape, which, through the poet's subjectivity, becomes charged "Not with mere visions but with sight/every flower spread out enlarged/at no word that we could recite" ["*De vue et non de vision/Toute fleur s'étalait plus large/Sans que nous en devisions*"] (OCI 29).⁶⁷ This emphasis on the process of seeing, rather than the thing seen—cited by Michelson at the outset of this chapter—is literalized in the structural role given to rhyme and repetition in the play of homonyms at the end of many lines, where only the visual break between words—their spacing—establishes the minimal difference between signs: *de vision/devisions* (of vision/we could recite), *se para/sépara* (was adorned/separated), *par chemins/parchemins* (by paths/parchments). The consequent play of sonic and semantic ambiguity is exemplified in the eighth stanza:

Gloire du long désir, Idées	Ideas, glory of long desire
Toute en moi s'exaltait de voir	All within me rejoiced to see
La famille des iridées	The irid family aspire
Surgir à ce nouveau devoir,	To this new responsibility

This stanza is an almost programmatic display of Mallarmé's process. The play of associations that binds *désir*, *Idées* (desire, Ideas) to *des iridées* (the botanical family comprising the iris, known as *Iridaceae*), and *de voir* (to see) to *devoir* (duty/task), operates only secondarily at the level of metaphor. Rather, Mallarmé splits the signifier into its molecular components to produce not only the musical play of assonance, but the dispersal of the idea itself, as it is transposed, structured, and "prismatically subdivided."

As I mentioned, the implications of the model of "transposition" within the Mallarméan corpus have remained relatively unexamined, limited to scattered references.

poets—and is dedicated to Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Joris Karl Huysmans' *À rebours*, published the prior year in 1884.

⁶⁷ I have used the translation by EH and AM Blackmore in Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, p. 53.

Alain Badiou, for example, notes that the principle of transposition, too often reduced to mere “hermeticism,” designates the conviction “that meaning is caught up in the movement of the poem, in its arrangement, and not in its supposed referent, that this movement operates between the eclipse of the subject and the dissolution of the object, and that what this movement produces is an Idea.”⁶⁸ Badiou’s reading emphasizes transposition as the submission of the author—“the disappearance of the poet speaking”—and of the world of things—“transposing a fact of nature into its vibratory near-disappearance”—to the operations of language in the process of writing. Badiou’s Platonism—evinced by the mandatory capitalization of “Idea”—leads him to affirm that the mutually assured destruction of author and object releases a “pure notion” that transcends its prior material embodiment to instantiate the emergence of the irreducibly new, what he calls the event.⁶⁹ In Badiou’s reading, however, structure and transposition lose their dialectical tension and become a linear process: the resolute attention to the materiality of language releases an “Idea” that escapes its prior rooting in the referent and “surges to this new responsibility.” Yet, if certain moments of Mallarmé’s thought seem to fall prey to the lure of this sort of idealism—which his century all but demanded—he always insisted that the sheer material opacity of linguistic structure should inevitably return to scuttle the flight of abstraction and criticized “an Idealism that... rejects natural materials as too crude, even when thought organizes them” (D 207). Further, the “idea itself” for Mallarmé was not a stable essence or event, but an absence inside the

⁶⁸ Alain Badiou, “A French Philosopher Responds to a Polish Poet,” in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 29-30

⁶⁹ Alain Badiou has devoted much of his life reading Mallarmé, from *Théorie du sujet* to his recent seminar “L’immanence des vérités,” (ENS, Fall 2012-Spring 2013), in which the flower of *Prose (pour des Esseintes)* was described as a formalization of the emergence of the new as an infinite interruption of the finite “situation” from which it arose.

referent—*l'absente de tous bouquets*—a *lapsus* momentarily revealed within the thing by language.

Confronting these questions, Paul de Man, in his dissertation on Mallarmé, W.B. Yeats, and Stefan George completed at Harvard between 1955-61, which is to say prior to his encounter with and development of deconstruction, wrote, “Transposition refers to... the impossibility, in poetry, of reproducing reality by direct imitation.”⁷⁰ The recognition of this caesura between the word and the world could have led Mallarmé—and, many have said, *did* lead him—on the one hand, to an arid formalism content with polishing linguistic gems relieved from any binding ties to the real, or, on the other, to an unrepentant idealism conceiving language as an unmediated vessel for truth itself, over and above the material world. However, Mallarmé’s dialectical thinking, de Man suggested, refused either option. As opposed to the Romantic notion of language as the instrument of unification between mind or Spirit and nature or Matter—which is to say, language as the medium of access to Being in its unity—Mallarmé arrived, painfully to be sure, at a model, as de Man put it, in which “the relationship between language and truth can never be an unmediated contact”:

Language *is* not truth, but a mediation between two modes of being which remain in essence opposed. It does not bring about a reconciliation, but it is true to the extent that it now *states* a distinction between the object and consciousness and knows the otherness of things for what it is. Any mediation implies the awareness of an original severance and the only way in which the language of truth can remain true is by admitting forever, by never forgetting, the given duality.⁷¹

That is to say, the principle of transposition holds firmly to a concept of truth, but one defined by “severance” rather than “unification.” Language, in this mode of thought, can

⁷⁰ Paul de Man, *Post-Romantic Predicament*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012, p. 93

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67

no longer root its truth claims upon its status as the medium of connectivity between our cognitive or phenomenological opening onto the world and the pure exteriority of the world itself. But this does not mean that we are trapped in the “prison house of language,” exiled from the real, with no access to truth.⁷² Rather, for Mallarmé, language’s access to truth—in a dialectical reversal that ranks among the most profound of the nineteenth century—is dependent upon the recognition that it is the medium of *disconnection*, bearing the mark of an originary separation.

It is on this point that Mallarmé’s transposition can be thought of as the negation, or the sublation, of Baudelaire’s concept of “*correspondance*.”⁷³ Baudelaire, in the poem of the same name, wrote,

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laisser parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers.

[Nature is a temple, where living columns
Sometimes emit confusing speech;
Man walks within these forests of signs
Which observe him as a kindred thing.]⁷⁴

In a letter to Alphonse Toussenel, Baudelaire clarified what he meant by “*correspondance*”: “The imagination is the most scientific of the faculties, for it alone can understand the *universal analogy*, or what a mystic religion calls *correspondance*.”⁷⁵

Drawn as much from Swedenborg as from Fourier, the concept of *correspondance*

⁷² I borrow the expression from Fredric Jameson, *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

⁷³ On the question of Mallarmé’s transcendence of the “negative romanticism” of Baudelaire, see the introduction to Paul Bénichou, *Selon Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, pp. 9-52.

⁷⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Editions de la nouvelle revue française, 1918, pp. 29-30. My translation, for sense rather than rhyme.

⁷⁵ Letter to Alphonse Toussenel “21 January 1856,” in Baudelaire, *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire*, Ed. and trans Rosemary Lloyd, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 79-80

conceives nature not simply as a metaphorical resource for the poet, but as itself *made up of* a hermetic system of analogies that call out to the poet for arrangement.⁷⁶ In this view, nature itself, as Roberto Calasso puts it, is “woven from analogies like an immense spider web,” and therefore the productivity of the poetic imagination is not in any way separate from reality (whether above it or moving within it), but fundamentally *made of the same substance*.⁷⁷ Engaging reality as a universal signifying system, made up of chains of analogy and hidden correspondences, Baudelaire’s poet is gifted with the “magical and supernatural light” to illuminate the “natural obscurity of things.”⁷⁸ In this view, nature is not to be opposed to artifice or the tools of poetic imagination; rather, nature is revealed *as artifice*, all the way down.

It was the burden of this Baudelairean model that Mallarmé sought to throw off, as evinced by the very title of one of his early prose works: “The Demon of Analogy.”⁷⁹ In particular, Mallarmé came to view Baudelaire’s *correspondance* as untenable because it embodied what Walter Benjamin described as “a model of experience which contains ritual elements,” insofar as nature itself was conceived as a symbolic encoding of “the

⁷⁶ In the “Poème du hashish,” Baudelaire notes, “Fourier and Swedenborg, one with his *analogies*, the other with his *correspondences*, are embodied in the vegetable and the animal that your gaze falls upon and, instead of teaching through the voice, they indoctrinate you with form and color.” Cited in Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012, p. 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18

⁷⁸ Describing a painting by François Tabar, Baudelaire notes, “Mais la fantaisie est vaste comme l’univers multiplié par tous les êtres pensants qui l’habitent. Elle est la première chose venue interprétée par le premier venu; et, si celui-là n’a pas l’âme qui jette une lumière magique et surnaturelle sur l’obscurité naturelle des choses, elle est une inutilité horrible, elle est la première venue souillée par le premier venu. Ici donc, plus d’analogie, sinon de hasard; mais au contraire trouble et contraste, un champ bariolé par l’absence d’une culture régulière.” Baudelaire, *Écrits esthétiques*, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992, p. 319

⁷⁹ This early prose work, written in 1864, details a poet’s traumatic experience as he is haunted by a nonsense phrase—“La Pénultième est morte”—which he recognizes cannot be reduced or explained by its connection to an image/idea, sound, or referent, but that rather constitutes a “signifying void” that the poet must dutifully mourn. D 17-18.

data of prehistory” in “veiled” form.⁸⁰ While Mallarmé used metaphors of poetry as incantation, the notion of a veiled language of things that could be perceived by the poet and translated into human language was irremediably tied to the presupposition of a transitive relationship between the realm of representation and that of nature.⁸¹

Conversely, Mallarmé’s principle of transposition—perhaps belied by its name—implied neither analogy between images or concepts nor synesthetic crossover between registers of experience, but an understanding of language’s negativity.

Indeed, the metaphysical presuppositions of the *correspondance* model—that the connectivity between language and the world was underwritten by a mystic principle—were precisely those that Mallarmé abandoned in the mid-1860s. Contemporaneous with his attempt to supersede the then-currently-reigning Baudelairean and Parnassian poetic paradigms, Mallarmé underwent a profound spiritual crisis, after which, as he put it, he vanquished “that old and evil plumage, now happily struck down, God,” and accepted that the human body and soul, and all its aspirations, were “but vain forms of matter.”⁸² The inexistence of God, Mallarmé realized, sheared away not only the presumed meaningfulness of the objects of the world, but also language’s access to this strata of meaning, were it to exist. Following the premises of his atheism—profoundly different from Baudelaire’s Satanism, which was still an inverted Christianity—Mallarmé proclaimed that he had, paradoxically, discovered “the intimate correlation of Poetry with

⁸⁰ Benjamin, “On some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 183-4, 201.

⁸¹ On this question, Mallarmé writes, “Abolished is the claim, aesthetically an error, even though it produced some real masterpieces, of including in the subtle paper of a volume something other than, for example, the horror of deep woods, or the scattered mute thunder of foliage: not the intrinsic and dense wood of the trees. A few spurts of intimate pride truly trumpeted evoke the architecture of a palace, the only one habitable: outside of any stone, on which the pages couldn’t close.” D 207.

⁸² Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 297, 342.

the Universe,” not in the *correspondance* between the symbolic plenitude of the world and the word, but, rather, in their shared emptiness.⁸³

“In excavating verse to this point,” Mallarmé wrote, “I have encountered twin abysses, which cause me to despair.” The first was the recognition that the absence of God is the only possible Absolute—“the Emptiness that is the truth”—while “the second emptiness is in my lungs,” as Mallarmé was gripped by a nervous pulmonary condition that he linked to the act of writing.⁸⁴ In a letter to Villiers de l’Isle-Adam from September 1867, the twenty-five-year-old Mallarmé wrote, “My thought has reached the point of thinking itself and I lack the strength to evoke solely in a *Néant* the void disseminated in its porosity.”⁸⁵ In moments of intellectual vertigo, Mallarmé proclaimed that his life’s work would be to write an *Oeuvre* that would found a new model of Beauty upon the Void, one to supersede the former models, which had been “bitten in the heart since Christianity, by Chimera.”⁸⁶ Toward this goal, he wrote to Eugène Lefébure of a conception of the “Modern Poet, *of the last*, who, at bottom, ‘is a critic above all else.’” “This is what I have observed in myself,” Mallarmé continued,

I have created my Oeuvre solely by *elimination*, and each acquired truth was born only through the loss of an impression that, having sparkled, was consumed and allowed me, thanks to these liberated shadows, to advance more deeply into the sensation of the Absolute Shadows. Destruction was my Béatrice.⁸⁷

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 366

⁸⁴ Mallarmé links his nervous pulmonary condition to writing, in which “the mere act of writing installs hysteria in my mind... and the impression of a quill working according to my will, even by another hand, gives me palpitations” *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 349. This utopian *Oeuvre* was referred most often by Mallarmé as *le Livre*, and conceived as a secular public ritual devoted to chance. See the discussion of this project in Chapter 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 366, 348-349

With destruction and critical negation taking the place of Dante's personified ideal of Beauty, Mallarmé discovered the fundamental principle of what he would later call transposition: language, once it has been reduced to its "essential" state, regains its proximity to truth, not despite, but *because* of its ultimate groundlessness. It would be the task of his poetry to think through the implications of language as a "disseminated void."

Representation and Structure Conflict: Cézannisme and Phenomenology

To unhinge the world of objects is to call into question the guarantees of our existence.
—Carl Einstein⁸⁸

In this section, I will demonstrate the degree to which Picasso's cubism shares fundamental features with Mallarmé's annihilating aesthetic, in which the very attention to the structure of representation led not to deeper knowledge of the world, but to a severance from it. Indeed, Picasso hinted at the terms with which we can approach such a proposition in a well-known interview with Zervos from 1935: "A painting used to be a sum of additions. In my case, a painting is a sum of destructions. I make a painting, and then I destroy it."⁸⁹ In a less famous proclamation, recalled by Françoise Gilot, Picasso proposed with a nearly cosmic perspective,

For me, painting is a dramatic action in the course of which reality finds itself split apart... The pure plastic act is only secondary as far as I'm concerned. What counts is the drama of the plastic act, the moment at which the universe comes out of itself and meets its own destruction.... Reality must be torn apart in every sense of the word.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Carl Einstein "Notes on Cubism," [Trans Charles W. Haxthausen], *October*, v. 107 (Winter 2004): p. 161

⁸⁹ Zervos "Conversations avec Picasso," p. 172

⁹⁰ Gilot and Lake, p. 59

The works of Cadaqués took this division of reality by the aesthetic act as far as Picasso would ever allow. Yet he need not have read Mallarmé to conceive of such a role for art: for, I will now argue, it was implied in the relentless pursuit of pictorial structure, which was intimately bound up with the reception of Cézanne. Several of the strongest historical interpretations of Cézanne have proposed that his painting's attention to the structure of perception is homologous to the task of phenomenology to conceptualize—if not to access or to picture—a strata of pure opening onto the world stripped of all utilitarian and socialized perception. This section will ultimately ascertain the degree to which Picasso's aesthetic destruction of reality can be reconciled with the process of phenomenological “bracketing” described by Edmond Husserl, or whether Picasso could have found in Cézanne a model of “structure” closer to Mallarmé's sense of representation as a means to speak the unhinging from the real.

In the landscapes and portraits of Fernande Olivier executed in Summer 1909 at Horta de Ebro, Picasso invested figure and ground with an architectural or sculptural solidity, in which each element of the composition would be secured within a total system of relations. This “rhythmization necessary for the coordination of the individual parts into the unity of the work of art,” Kahnweiler argued, “cannot take place without producing disturbing distortions, since the object in effect is no longer ‘present’ in the painting, that is, since it does not yet have the least resemblance to actuality” (RC 12). As Kahnweiler put it in 1914, “The structure of the painting, which is the combination of the manifold of the outside world in the unity [*Einheit*] of the artwork, requires a rhythm of form, which may, or rather *must*, come into conflict with the representation that closely

follows the outside world.”⁹¹ For Kahnweiler, the great lesson that Cubism offered in 1909, that which would both augur the crisis in Summer 1910 and point the way to its resolution, was, as he succinctly put it on the first page of *The Rise of Cubism*:

“Representation and Structure conflict. Their reconciliation by the new painting, and the stages along the road to this goal, are the subject of this work” (RC 1). The meaning of these terms, of the conflict between them and of the possibility (or desirability) of their “reconciliation,” will now occupy us directly in order to render to the perilous quest for aesthetic “structure” and its destructive relation to the represented “object” its proper historical (and ideological) weight.

To return to the motif that occupied us in the Matorel prints, a work such as *Nude in an Armchair* of Summer 1909, (DR cat. 302, Figure 1.10) subjects every inch of the canvas to an equal structuring force, transforming the picture surface into a topography of interlocking and sharply canted planes (CE 215). One could say that the figure framed by the armchair is conceived as an analogue of the painting as a whole, built up out of the same fabric of facets, buckling between concavity and convexity. The figure’s integrity derives from the sense of her being mapped by a structuring force continuous with the depicted space of the forest and house behind her, one that sutures her to the ground behind and preserves her independence from it. Likewise, the structural unity of the canvas as a whole acts as a means to ensure the total “autonomization” of the pictorial surface.⁹² Notice, along the right edge of the painting, how the intersection of the schematically cubic house in the top quadrant with the cerulean green ground below

⁹¹ Kahnweiler, *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik*, pp. 57-58.

⁹² On this point, Carl Einstein wrote, “We would remark that the fact of conserving the surface serves the isolation and autonomization of the *tableau*; this factor, and the rigorous analogy of forms, beside the psychic process preserved in its unity, produce the totality of cubist *tableaux*” Einstein, *L’art du XXe siècle*, Paris: Jacqueline Chambon, 2011, p. 104.

divides the canvas neatly in half. The green field isolated there forms two nested right triangles that function as a recursive “echo of the framing edge.”⁹³ Indeed, each of the four corners of the *Nude in an Armchair* strategically anchor the figure to the ground, and the total composition to the physical limits of the canvas. On the top half of the canvas, the three tree trunks that radiate from the left corner merge seamlessly with the side of the woman’s head and her drapery, and the curved edge of the armchair at right is roughly flush with the impossible geometry of the house façade; on the bottom, the woman’s arm converges with the bottom left corner at the same forty-five degree angle as the bit of drapery at bottom right.⁹⁴

Almost immediately in the historiography of cubism, this conception of painting as a closed system of relations through which any motif would have to be filtered, this emphasis on “uncompromising, organically articulated structure,” as Kahnweiler put it, was described as a direct inheritance from the painting of Cézanne. Cézanne, so the story goes, reacted against Impressionism by shifting away from visual light-effects and toward a comprehension of form: “Cézanne’s great contribution which has made him the father of the entire new art lies precisely in his return to structure” (CE 184). Against the spectralization of light effected by the Impressionist “prismatic palette,” which was still bound to the logic of naturalism even as it marked that logic’s crisis point, Cézanne

⁹³ Here, I cite William Rubin’s description of Picasso’s constructive brushstrokes as recursive or indexical references to the shape of the canvas itself. See Rubin, *Picasso in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972, p. 206

⁹⁴ This last device was also employed in *Three Women*, of Autumn 1907-Winter 1908 (DR cat. 131) to suture the figures to the canvas. Note Leo Steinberg’s discussion of the drama of three-dimensional form struggling for definition from the “barrenness of the flat” and the process of triangulation and subdivision that proceeds from a similar 45 degree division from the bottom right edge of the canvas in *Three Women*. “We are given to see that the breeding ground whence the image takes rise is not so much a remembered world of forms pre-existent (though this world too is at work), but rather the slate of the original field.” Leo Steinberg, “Resisting Cézanne: Picasso’s *Three Women*,” *Art in America*, (November-December 1978): p. 128

solidified the interstices between forms that Monet, in his goal to record optical sensations, had delivered to a condition of generalized chromatic dissipation. While the Impressionists blasted open contours of the objects they depicted, Cézanne—in the account offered by Kahnweiler—returned to painting its solidity, a sculptural or tactile quality, rendered through the rigid construction of strictly delimited color patches, which severed ties to the naturalistic depiction of light in Cézanne’s rigorously reduced palette. Yet, as we shall see, the consequence of this uncompromising desire for architectural unity was the disquieting loss of contact with visual reality: because Cézanne’s “constant preoccupation is with the structure of the work; in the structure he distorts the object, just as in the color harmony, he discolors it” (RC 4).

Kahnweiler’s only peer in the early theorization of cubism, Carl Einstein, for his part, noted that “Cézanne forced impressionist means toward the sculptural” and claimed that if he left many of his paintings unfinished it was because “maybe the means were too refined, the atomic structure too complex.”⁹⁵ For Einstein, Cézanne did not renege upon the Impressionist project by returning structuring force to contour line, but sublated its promise by “sculpturally” ordering the color atoms—to the point of giving over the bulk of the canvas to a scrim of *taches*. In the thicket of color-bricks making up the dress in Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair*, 1877, (Figure 1.11), for example, both clothing and face, both figure and ground are constructed out of the same pictorial matter and forged together into a compositional circuit. Color, for Cézanne, thus replaced line as the primary structuring element of the canvas in order to promise a “logic of organized

⁹⁵ Einstein, *L’art du XXe siècle*, p. 36. Kramar for his part notes that “the construction of the tableau is the new element brought by Cézanne,” “an art that puts the accent on the form of the body all the while neglecting color, stripped of its autonomy.” Kramar, *Cubisme*, p. 7.

sensations,” as the painter put it, that would overcome the Impressionists’ purely optical verisimilitude.⁹⁶

For Einstein, as for Kahnweiler, the “tectonic structuration” of the canvas, as evinced in the unifying and alternating rhythm of forms that sutured the body to the canvas in Picasso’s works of 1909, inevitably threatened “the fragmentation of the object.”⁹⁷ But whereas, for Einstein, the destruction of the object allowed for the autonomization of the tableau itself and a critique of reification,⁹⁸ Kahnweiler’s goal was ultimately to demonstrate that Cubism had reconciled representation and structure by making visible “the very structure of representation,” as Sebastian Zeidler aptly puts it.⁹⁹

For Kahnweiler, cubism’s emphasis on total structure led to two naïve misinterpretations, which Zeidler calls the “distortion fallacy” and the “geometric fallacy.” In the first, viewers compare “the real object as articulated by the rhythm of forms in the painting” to their “memory images” of the same objects in the world and conclude that the Cubist work was irredeemably “distorted”; in the second, the viewer again compares the painting to their everyday visual experience and sees nothing but “geometric images,” which is to say, *representations* of geometric form or diagrams. Both of these “fallacies,” however, missed the point that, for Kahnweiler, the rigidity of structure in a Cubist painting was not oriented toward the *imitation* of the world’s

⁹⁶ Paul Cézanne, *Conversations avec Cézanne*, Paris: Collection Macula, 1978, p. 36

⁹⁷ Einstein, *L’art du XXe Siècle*, p. 104

⁹⁸ As Einstein wrote, “Mission of the revolution: *dechosification*, destruction of the object to save humanity.” Carl Einstein, “La révolution brise l’histoire et la tradition,” *Cahiers du Musée National de l’Art Moderne*, n. 117 (Autumn 2011): p. 12.

⁹⁹ Sebastian Zeidler, *Defense of the Real: Carl Einstein’s History and Theory of Art*, Columbia University, Dissertation, 2005, p. 113

appearances, but, rather, a result of the investigation into the conditions of possibility for the world's appearance to perception.¹⁰⁰

Kahnweiler's conception of cubism as an architectonics of perception drew from Cézanne's famous letter to Emile Bernard, in which he wrote of his painterly goal: "To treat nature according to the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, all put into perspective, so that each side of an object, or of a plane, is directed toward a central point."¹⁰¹ In Kahnweiler's view, the "cubist grid" that developed from summer 1909 to Cadaqués followed Cézanne in reducing objects to their basis in "simple stereometric forms," because, Kahnweiler continues, "Our a priori knowledge of these forms is the necessary condition, without which there would be no seeing, no world of objects" (RC 14).¹⁰² "Cubism, in accordance with its role as both constructive and representational art, brings the forms of the physical world as close as possible to their underlying basic forms," Kahnweiler argued. The "structure" of a Cubist canvas, then, presents the very "categories of vision," in congruence with the Kantian categories of knowledge: "Like a skeletal frame these basic forms underlie the impression of the represented object in the final visual result of the painting; they are no longer 'seen' but are the basis of the 'seen'"

¹⁰⁰ See again Zeidler's excellent discussion of the "distortion fallacy" and the "geometric fallacy." In Zeidler's reading, Kahnweiler's *Rise of Cubism* should be situated in the same "associationist" or "assimilationist" intellectual world of Neo-Kantian epistemologists, such as Hildebrand, Helmholtz, and Wilhelm Wundt. See *Ibid.*, 107-121.

¹⁰¹ Cézanne, *Conversations avec Cézanne*, p. 27. In his article published in the July 1904 issue of *l'Occident*, Bernard rephrases Cézanne's statement: "Tout dans la nature se modèle selon la sphère, le cône, et le cylindre. Il faut s'apprendre à peindre sur ces figures simples, on pourra ensuite faire tout ce qu'on voudra." *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁰² In *Juan Gris*, Kahnweiler commented that this letter by Cézanne is the "herald of cubism," since it proposed "as the means of handling volume (which he considered fundamental) the three basic forms of our spatial perception, the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone." JG 112.

form” (RC 14).¹⁰³ Finally, “On this structure we build the products of our imagination,” Kahnweiler concluded (RC 14). Upon of this primary phenomenological intuition of form, the Cubists could freely invent new signs, use unfamiliar materials, and distribute them in unconventional ways, with the conviction that the spectators would call upon their cognitive resources to “read” the signs as perceived and create in their own minds an equivalent to the “objects” and “emotions” that the painter sought to express.¹⁰⁴

Kahnweiler drew from neo-Kantian associationism and, later, from Mallarmé to describe Cubism as an architectonics of perception, presenting not the object as seen but constructing a two-dimensional stage for the viewer’s perceptual process. Yet, this desire for art to present (not represent) the primordial conditions of possibility for perception itself anticipated the premises of one of the most influential and debated accounts of the significance of Cézanne: the phenomenology of painting formulated most directly in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s famous essay of 1945, “Cézanne’s Doubt.” Indeed, Kahnweiler later noted, “One day people will certainly try to discover the connections between cubism and a philosophy *contemporary* to it. It seems to me probable that Edmund Husserl will be taken into consideration, since his phenomenology remains a transcendental idealism” (JG 267). It is to this phenomenological understanding of painting that we now turn.

¹⁰³ On the basis of a comparison between the neo-Kantian categories of knowledge (in Wundt, for example), and Kahnweiler’s “categories of vision,” Zeidler writes, “Both promise to account *a priori* for the realization of any possible experience.... And for all the emphatic modernity with which the one promises the final completion of the edifice of rational thought and the other the ‘unprecedented freedom’ of a new pictorial language, their categorical architectonics diagram what Michel Foucault has called, in a related context, ‘an archaic morality, the ancient Decalogue that the identical imposed upon difference.’” Zeidler, p. 120-121.

¹⁰⁴ On the question of cognitive association in Kahnweiler’s work, and his relationship to Carl Einstein see Charles W. Haxthausen, “Carl Einstein, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Cubism, and the Visual Brain,” *Nonsite* N. 2 (June 12 2011). <http://nonsite.org/article/carl-einstein-daniel-henry-kahnweiler-cubism-and-the-visual-brain>

Merleau-Ponty described Cézanne's painting as seeking a mode of vision *prior* to the assimilating interference of the intellect and the habits that make up our naturalistic experience of the world. In this view, Cézanne's "distortions"—such as the elongated desk in his *Portrait of Gustave Geoffroy* (Figure 1.12), which seems to stretch below the viewer's feet—discard the conventions of organizing space and objects according to scientific perspective as a means to plunge the viewer into a form of "primordial perception," a "lived perspective."¹⁰⁵ Although fixed through the very act of painting, the table that stretches to the bottom of the canvas registered to Merleau-Ponty the succession of visual data as our eyes run over the surface of an object, before these disjunctive impressions are cognitively integrated into a coherent whole. Therefore, in Merleau-Ponty's view, "It is Cézanne's genius that when the over-all composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes."¹⁰⁶ While Merleau-Ponty's insistence that that the "lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one," runs counter to Kahnweiler's geometricizing interpretation of the a priori fundamentals of perception, both sought a form of painting in which representation would no longer seek to approximate the world already integrated or assimilated by the sensorium, but, in a "harmony parallel to nature," as Cézanne put it, present a radically inhuman world, stripped of the processes by which human vision is

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14

made social, practical, and useful. This would be painting that would penetrate “to the root of things, beneath the imposed order of humanity.”¹⁰⁷

For Jonathan Crary, Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation rested upon the “dubious assumption” of a link between Cézanne’s “forgetfulness” of the cultural assumptions that make up the “natural” image of the world and Edmund Husserl’s “goal of the isolation of a ‘pure’ form of consciousness, stripped of all the accretions of habit and socialization.”¹⁰⁸ While Crary rejects Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Cézanne, he nevertheless suggests that a parallel exists between Cézanne and the project of phenomenology as first formulated by Husserl. Both, in their respective fields, symptomatized a wider “crisis in perception,” and sought “to escape from reified, habitual patterns of perception inherent in various aspects of the rationalization and commodification of experience in the 1890s and early 1900s.”¹⁰⁹

For Crary, Cézanne’s asocial vision and Husserl’s phenomenology were both preoccupied with the problem of attention, as the means by which the fragmented sensory data of the world is given form. Husserl arrived at the concept of an “attentional beam, illuminating not objects and empirical relations but essences and noema,” oriented toward “an impersonal, preindividual transcendental sphere, free of anything empirical, of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 16. This did not mean that Cézanne would give his painting over to a kind of formless miasma; rather, through the rigor of his composition, Cézanne’s work would make manifest the very process by which human perception constructed sense data into objects: “He did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear; he wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization.” *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, p. 282.

¹⁰⁹ Crary, p. 285. For Crary, one of the central problems of Husserl that relates to Cézanne is “to explain how the realm of the psychical, which is intrinsically one of perpetual modulations, fusions, entrances and exits of contents, can yield stable, objectively valid cognitions.” *Ibid.*

anything spatiotemporal, to which attention appertains.”¹¹⁰ The task of attention, in this view, is to “pierce” the “dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality” “with rays from the illuminating focus of attention,” and in so doing to construct the perception of the natural environment, the “world-about-me.”¹¹¹ Conversely, the patches of Cézanne’s brushstrokes evince not the jumpiness of saccadic vision but the discovery within focused attention—that very procedure with which Husserl constructs the consistency, the persistence, and the coherence of the natural image of the world—of a zone of indeterminacy, leading ultimately to “a liquid groundless space, filled with forces and intensities rather than objects.”¹¹²

The vitalism imported from a Deleuzian reading of Bergson that underpins Crary’s reading—with its “plane of immanence” and flows of unbounded intensity underneath the world of reified experience—may in fact be no less “dubious” than Merleau-Ponty’s dream of accessing a primordial vision or Kahnweiler’s rigid a priori categories of vision, even if we prefer its emphasis on flux and difference.¹¹³ Each of these models proceeds via the presumption of continuity between the realm of representation and the underlying nature of human experience or of being itself, whether conceived as the phenomenological plenum for Merleau-Ponty, the skeletal structure of perception for Kahnweiler, or the differential flow of the *durée* for Crary. If I will nevertheless go on to argue for a connection between Picasso’s cubism and Husserl’s

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, translated by W.R. Boyce Gibson. London: Routledge, 2012, p. 52

¹¹² Crary, p. 359.

¹¹³ See the similarly Deleuzian-Bergsonist “differential ontology” that Zeidler mobilizes (via a reading of Carl Einstein) against Kahnweiler. Zeidler, “Totally Against a Subject: Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik*,” *October*, n. 107 (Winter 2004): p. 14-46.

phenomenology, I begin with the presupposition that visual (or linguistic) representation is ill-equipped to overlay or access the primordial substrata of existence without mediation or misalignment—if one presumes such a strata to exist in the first place.

Indeed, it is precisely the gap between representation and human access to exterior reality that Picasso affirmed in a 1926 statement on the “pervasive” “influence of Cézanne”:

I understood that painting had an intrinsic value, independent of the actual representation of objects. I asked myself if we should not represent the facts as we know them rather than as we see them... For many years, Cubism had no other aim than painting for painting’s sake. It rejected all elements that had to do with its palpable reality [*sa réalité sensible*].¹¹⁴

Picasso’s desire to separate representation from the objects represented, from their visual and “palpable reality,” bears a strong resemblance to the very first step of the phenomenological method as described by Husserl: the *ἐποχή* (*epoché*, suspension, reduction, or bracketing). Husserl’s goal to secure the grounds for the positive knowledge of the world offered by the sciences began by stripping away the veil of what he called the “natural standpoint,” which is “the world of facts and affairs... a *world of values*, a *world of goods*, a *practical world*,” viz. the world as given to the subject in everyday instrumental existence.¹¹⁵

The phenomenological process of reduction or bracketing began by setting aside the question of whether objects actually exist, of whether there *is* a world at all. Husserl distinguishes the *epoché* from, on the one hand, sophistic *denial* of the world, and, on the

¹¹⁴ The statement, titled “Letter on Art,” was published on May 16, 1926 in the Russian journal *Ogoniok* and translated into French and English in the French journal *Formes* in 1930. This “letter on art” is discussed and cited in John Elderfield, “Picasso’s Extreme Cézanne” *Cézanne and Beyond*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009, p. 213. Steinberg cited a fragmentary version of this statement to substantiate his argument that Picasso would have felt the need to *separate* himself from the “pervasive” influence of Cézanne. Steinberg, “Resisting Cézanne,” p. 123

¹¹⁵ Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 53

other, skeptical (or Cartesian) *doubt* of its existence. Rather than denying the “Natural Thesis” (which holds that the “fact-world *has its being out there*”), the *epoché* simply “suspended” it—a term that Husserl imparts with the full dialectical sense of the Hegelian “Aufhebung.”¹¹⁶ Confronting the thesis that the world exists, phenomenology refuses a stance of affirmation or denial:

We set it as it were ‘out of action,’ we ‘disconnect it,’ ‘bracket it.’ It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connexional system. We can also say: The thesis is experienced as lived [*Erlebnis*], but we make ‘no use’ of it.¹¹⁷

For Husserl, the first step of phenomenology, then, is not to “doubt” the existence of beings or Being, nor even to advance the “supposition of Non-Being,” but simply to propose its “*putting out of action*.”¹¹⁸

But what remains when the whole world is bracketed and every object in it disconnected, including the *cogito* of the human being who performs the *epoché*? What remains as a “phenomenological residuum” is what Husserl termed a “primordial form of apprehension”: the transcendental subjectivity or Ego, that which is *prior* to the world, that which, in fact, constitutes the minimal condition for the givenness of the world. Thus, for Husserl, “The *epoché* can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me.”¹¹⁹ If this “pure consciousness” that persists irrespective of any given object of perception was described by Husserl in earlier writings as “intention” or “attention,” in *Ideas* from 1913,

¹¹⁶ For Husserl’s remarks on Hegel, see *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960, p. 21.

he divides it into twin categories of noetic and noematic experience. *Noesis* refers to the process by which the experience of an object is made possible, and *noema* refers to the object constructed as a correlate of this subjective process of perception.¹²⁰ Such is precisely the advantage of phenomenology, for Husserl, over all other forms of apperception that remain within the purview of the naturalistic thesis:

They do not succeed because they cannot replace the practice of living in perception, their attention turned towards the perceived object both in observation and in theoretical inquiry, by that of directing their glance upon the perceiving itself, or upon the *way* in which the perceived object with its distinguishing features is presented, and of taking that which presents itself in the immanent analysis of the essence just as it actually does present itself.¹²¹

The residuum of Husserl's suspension of the natural thesis is a mode of access to both the *noetic* (the mental process of perception) and *noematic* (the object constituted through this process of perception), rather than simply the object as naturalistically perceived. Therefore, Husserl argued that the "reduction" performed by phenomenology was always, in fact, an expansion of the terrain of existence, and that the "phenomenological *epoché* lays open (to me, the meditating philosopher) toward *an infinite realm of being of a new kind*, as the sphere of a new kind of experience: transcendental experience."¹²²

This certainly presents powerful parallels with the practice of Cézanne, who bracketed the imitation of natural vision to present the object in the process of its coming

¹²⁰ The *noema* for Husserl must not be confused with the object as it exists out in the world, the object as conceived according to the "natural thesis." There has, of course, been much debate about the status of the noema in Husserl's thought, but for our purposes, we can simply note Dan Zahavi's description of the noema, and refer the reader to his account of the main lines of the debate: "After the reduction, we continue to be concerned with the worldly object, but we now no longer consider it naively, rather we focus on it precisely as it is intended and given, that is as a correlate of experience." Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 59

¹²¹ Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 183

¹²² Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 27.

into being, bound to the total composition of the painting, and also to Kahnweiler's vision of Picasso as simultaneously presenting the noetic structure of representation and the noematic object thus perceived. In a letter to the poet Hugo von Hoffmansthal from January 1907, Husserl seemed to authorize such comparisons, writing that "phenomenological intuiting is thus closely related to aesthetic intuiting in 'pure' art."¹²³ Conversely, he continued, "The more the work of art demands an existential attitude of us out of itself (for instance, a naturalistic sensuous appearance: the natural truth of photography), the less aesthetically pure the work is."¹²⁴ Demonstrating a set of shared historical presuppositions between phenomenology and modernist painting, Husserl suggests that the progressive suspension of naturalistic depiction in art—the more it "brackets" the existential assumptions of the natural standpoint—renders to representation a phenomenological purity.

Yet the application of the *epoché* to the realm of representation introduces a contradiction in Husserl's system. On the one hand, representation itself is the very figure of the mediate, the secondary, the copy, in other words, the very target of the phenomenological "suspension." On the other hand, as Kahnweiler noted, the more "pure" a painting becomes, the more it becomes sealed off from the outside world by dint of its own internal logic—becoming an object in itself: "The Cubists, following in the footsteps of Cézanne, always insisted on the *independent existence* of the work of art. They talked about '*le tableau-objet*,' an object which could be put anywhere. (Like many of my painter friends, I have a taste for pictures standing around on the floor)" (JG 104). The phenomenology of painting is bound by fundamental problems, for it either

¹²³ Husserl, *Briefwechsel V. vii*, Boston : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994, p. 135.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

succumbs to the naturalistic or “existential” depiction of objects, or it threatens to lapse into objecthood. No painting—however abstract—has access to the strata of pure cognition, to the “primordial” or “living present,” and Husserl was aware that the primary obstacle to the construction of a phenomenological image in paint would be the brute materiality of the medium: the image as conceived by phenomenology, he insists, is “not indeed the picture as a *thing*, of which, we can say, for instance, that it hangs on the wall.”¹²⁵

Indeed, for Husserl, after the suspension of the “world-about-me” and all its objects, the “phenomenological residuum” could not be an image or object, but rather a layer of sheer other-directedness or intention, a non-temporal flow of consciousness existing only in the “living present.” This “intentionality without object” would secure the realm of presentation (*Präsentation, Gegenwärtigung*), from which representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) would be banished.¹²⁶ For Jacques Derrida, however, Husserl’s notion of pure self-presence—operating “in the blink of an eye” [*Augenblick*]¹²⁶—inevitably opened itself to the spacing of temporalization: even Husserl admitted that the pure present would be girded on either side by a “primary memory” (a force of retention that

¹²⁵ Husserl *Ideas I*, p. 212. To be sure Husserl considered multiple “levels” of presentation, describing “a very complicated and yet lightly grasped construction of perceptions out of perceptions of a higher level”: “A name on being mentioned remains us of the Dresden Gallery and of our last visit there: we wander through the rooms, and stand before a picture of Teniers which represents a picture gallery. When we consider that pictures of the latter would in their turn portray pictures which on their part exhibited readable inscriptions and so forth, we can measure what interweaving of presentations, and what links of connexion between the discernible features in the series of pictures, can really be set up. But for the illustrating of *our insight into essences*, in particular of our insight into the ideal possibility of carrying on the dovetailing processes indefinitely, we do not need to consider such complicated cases as these.” *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, Trans Leonard Lawlor. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011, p. 55

makes presentation possible in the first place) and a “primary anticipation” (a force of pro-tention that allows for openness to the new).¹²⁷ As Derrida argues,

As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the non-now, of perception and non-perception in the zone of originarity that is common to originary impression and to retention, we welcome the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*, non-presence and non-evidentness into the *blink of an eye of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink of an eye and the duration closes the eye.¹²⁸

It is here that Derrida coins the term “arche-writing,” as well as “*différance*” (a term that would preserve the doubleness of *différer* as differing and deferring).¹²⁹ These two concepts, for Derrida, demonstrate the persistence at the very core of “immanent experience” of what Husserl sought to exclude by the procedure of the *epoché*: the temporalization of sense. “Since sense, as Husserl has recognized, has a temporal nature,” Derrida writes, “it is never simply present. It is always already engaged in the ‘movement’ of the trace, that is, in the order of ‘signification.’” Therefore, at the very moment when the “natural standpoint” should be reduced to the pure self-apprehension of the phenomenological subject, Derrida points to “non-presence and difference (mediacy, the sign, referral, etc.) right in the heart of self-presence.”¹³⁰ If Husserl’s bracketing sought to exclude the secondary domain of language, it ended up delivering—in

¹²⁷ For a discussion of the dimensions of retention and protention operating in “immanent experience [*Erfahrung*]” see Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 149-151.

¹²⁸ Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 57

¹²⁹ In his excellent treatment of Derrida’s critique of Husserl, from which my own writing has benefited, Martin Hagglund reminded us that “Arche-writing should not be confused with the empirical concept of writing or be placed in opposition to speech. Rather, Derrida’s argument is that a number of traits associated with empirical writing—such as the structure of representation, intrinsic finitude, and the relation to an irreducible exteriority—reinforce the conditions of possibility for experience and life in general, which is thus characterized by an arche-writing. Prior to any actual system of notation, whose application and use would be a matter of empirical need, there is an ‘ultratranscendental’ necessity that experience be inscribed in order to be what it is.” Martin Hagglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 51.

¹³⁰ Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 13

Derrida's reading—"pure" perception itself to the condition of writing, as the principle of the delay, of temporalization, of spacing.¹³¹

As with Derrida's deconstructive reading of Husserl, the very structural stringency that Kahnweiler hoped would give Picasso's painting access to "an a priori knowledge of... forms... without which there would be no seeing, no world of objects," actually rendered cubism over to pure mediacy and spacing, on the one hand, and pure objecthood, on the other (RC 14). What is left is a form of representation that suspends the object-world while promising no access to any substrata of presentation (whether phenomenological, cognitive, or perceptual), leaving only painterly process. As William Rubin argued, "While Picasso was the first consciously to emphasize the painting process as an experience for the viewer, it was Cézanne's new way of composing a painting that made the drama of pictorial integration—the mosaic of decisions that determine its *becoming* a work of art—a subject for art itself."¹³²

Indeed, I would propose as an emblem of this groundlessness the most notorious fact of Cézanne's painting: the unpainted sections proliferating through his canvases that introject non-painting into the work of art. If Picasso in 1909 inherited from Cézanne an impulse to structure every element of the canvas into an integral whole, this very "horror

¹³¹ Needless to say, Derrida's interpretation has been contentious among Husserl scholars, notably Paul Ricoeur, Zahvi and Rudolf Bernet. For an account of the debate, from an avowed partisan of the Derridean view, see Hagglund, pp. 54-61. Hagglund notes that "Zahavi has pointed out that Husserl guards himself against Derrida's interpretation by 'extending' the concept of presence. According to the model of extended presence, the retention and protention are not past or future with respect to the now of the primal impression. Rather these three functions (primal impression-retention-protention) constitute a 'living presence' that is the fundamental *form* of all experience. According to this reading, Derrida is mistaken to interpret retention and protention as implying a 'delay' or a 'deferral' of presence." *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹³² Rubin, "Cézannisme and the Beginnings of Cubism," in *Cézanne: The Late Work*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977, p. 189

vacui” as Max Raphael described it in 1913, led to the persistence of the *non-finito*.¹³³ In Cézanne’s *Bouquet of Peonies in a Green Jar* (c. 1898, Figure 1.13), for example, a painting that Braque bought from Vollard and treasured all his life, the blank canvas—painting’s “reserve”—is conscripted to play several roles at once: it operates as a wall set back into depth, passes into the blooms of the peonies themselves, and runs through the green leaves, oscillating between figure and ground.¹³⁴ Yet as Bois put it, “The whites of Cézanne are thus not open sores, but the unavoidable consequence of his way of working: they are void spaces that are as constructive as the filled-in ones.”¹³⁵ The constructive role of the blank was a result of Cézanne’s conception of the painting as a sort of tensile totality that he worked on, as he attested, all at once. The paradox is that one of the most obsessive attempts in modern painting to secure the totality of the canvas as a system of relations—governed by what Bois calls “the economy of the session,” in which any deposited mark would occasion a reordering of the whole precariously balanced ecology of the painting—should lead to the proliferation of holes in the painting.¹³⁶ This reading goes some way toward answering the “attraction and the riddle” of Cézanne’s work, as Lawrence Gowing put it, “The move toward the disintegration of the object in some of the most memorable works of a painter so passionately attached to objects.”¹³⁷ As Gowing described it, Cézanne’s ultimate recognition, evident in his late work, was that “the

¹³³ “A horror vacui speaks from these pictures, a fear of the wide expanse of the heavens, before the bad and completely incomprehensible infinity, which immediately takes place, where the notion of quantity and measurability is no longer sufficient.” Max Raphael, *Von Monet zu Picasso*, München: Delphin-Verlag, 1913, p. 113.

¹³⁴ See Rubin, “Cézannisme,” p. 200 n. 139.

¹³⁵ Bois, “Cézanne: Words and Deeds,” *October*, v. 84 (Spring 1994): p. 42.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* See also, Yve-Alain Bois, “Matisse and ‘Arche-drawing’” in *Painting as Model*, p. 48-51.

¹³⁷ Lawrence Gowing, “Logic of Organized Sensation,” in Rubin, *Cézanne: The Late Work*, p. 56.

reality of the subject itself, the actual motif, could not be transferred to art by imitation... [but] could only be made real through whatever was intrinsically real in painting,” which is to say the organization of chromatic patches into an integrated whole.¹³⁸ Establishing a “harmony parallel to nature” in painting, in other words, depended precisely upon the acknowledgement of art’s disconnection from the world. For now, it suffices to note here the extraordinary convergence between this model of painting and Mallarmé’s flower transposed into its own oblivion.

While Cézanne, at least in his recorded statements, considered the blanks as traumatic signs of perpetual “unfinished,” it was precisely this “anxiety” that attracted Picasso, and which he sought to incorporate into the work of art by highlighting process.¹³⁹ In his analysis of *Bread and Fruit Dish*, Winter 1908, (Figure 1.14) Rubin describes the transformation of the scene—via several intermediate studies—from a banquet with a Harlequin at center and a “Gilles” figure at left, to a still life that maintained the overall compositional structure of the first sketches, but drained it of its “narrative” content.¹⁴⁰ Tracing the progressive emptying of the motif, Rubin demonstrates how arms shifted to baguettes, hands into an inverted teacup, and a standing

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63

¹³⁹ This perhaps provides a way to rescue Picasso’s remarks to Zervos about Cézanne from banality: “It’s not what the artist does that counts, but what he *is*. What forces our interest is Cézanne’s anxiety.” Zervos, “Conversation avec Picasso,” p. 173-78. Cézanne’s anxiety was intimately related to the *non-finito*, as Cézanne remarked in his letters to Émile Bernard, published in *Le mercure de France* in October 1907: “Or, vieux, soixante-dix ans environ, les sensations colorantes qui donnent la lumière sont causes d’abstraction, qui ne me permettent pas de couvrir ma toile ni de poursuivre la délimitation des objets quand les points de contact sont ténus, délicats, d’où il ressort que mon image ou tableau est incomplète.” Cézanne, “Lettres à Émile Bernard,” *Mercure de France*, 15 October 1907, p. 623

¹⁴⁰ What remained for Rubin was the work’s “iconic” value, by which he means a “static, frontal, and concentrated image” disengaged from concern with psychological relations or symbolic content. Rubin was building on the discoveries of Christian Geelhaar. Rubin, “From Narrative to “Iconic” in Picasso: The Buried Allegory in Bread and Fruit dish on a Table and the Role of Les Demoiselles d’Avignon,” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 4, (December 1983): p. 627

woman dissipated into a compote; only legs poking out from under the table remain as vestigial signs of the transformation. Rubin argues that the scene was initially conceived as an allegory of the competing influences facing Picasso, who depicts himself as a Harlequin, flanked by Rousseau/Gilles at left and Cézanne as a contemplative figure with Kronstadt hat at right. In subsequent versions, however, Picasso “buried” the allegory, transposing it to the stylistic register: the Rousseau-esque cerulean green at left transitions to the Cézannean non-finito at right. While Rubin’s reading proposes a transference of semantic (or even allegorical) content from representation to structure, this work also inaugurated a principle that will become generalized and abstracted in Cadaqués: “a transmigration of forms—where shapes that remain constant pass to new identities.”¹⁴¹

Rubin’s observation that certain structural or formal elements could remain fixed in Picasso’s work, while their identities would become indeterminate, was also at the heart of his discussion of the legacy of Cézanne in Picasso and Braque’s paintings from 1908-9 and of his debate with Leo Steinberg on these questions. For Rubin, Picasso had inherited from Cézanne, via Braque, the means of structuring a canvas through the technique of *passage*, the linkage of spatially discrete objects within a painting by opening the contours between discontinuous planes, primarily through closely-valued tonal transitions. The ultimate effect, which Rubin saw exemplified in Braque’s landscapes at l’Estaque, and imported by Picasso for the first time in *Three Women*, was the construction of the whole surface of the canvas as a “simulacrum of *bas-relief*.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

¹⁴² In his monograph on Picasso, Rubin writes, “Cézanne’s contours were rarely closed; there was usually some point at which the planes of an object bled or elided with one another and with those of objects

Having closed off the recession into depth through Cézannian high horizon-lines, for example, Braque could, in a work like the *Viaduct at l'Estaque*, 1908 (Figure 1.15), construct an overall sense of the painting being built outward toward the viewer from the closed-off ground of the canvas, rather than backward into an imaginatively penetrable space.¹⁴³ “This technique,” Rubin writes, “not only subordinated the integrity of individual forms to the fabric of the composition as a whole but enabled and invited the eye to *pass* uninterruptedly from plane to plane through the whole space of the picture.”¹⁴⁴

Steinberg, while accepting Rubin’s description in the cases of Braque and Cézanne, suggested, for Picasso, a “shift in emphasis” away from *passage* and toward the “catastrophic abutments” that, he insisted, were far more characteristic of Picasso’s works from *Three Women* to *Horta*. As proof, Steinberg described how Picasso subdivided and fractured what should be continuous surfaces according to the logic of naturalism. The sign, for Steinberg, of this tendency to parcel up figure and ground alike into schismatic breaks, was “the acentered arris,” a cognate of ridge, watershed, corner, angle, edge, fold, or crease.¹⁴⁵ The arris marks the traumatic concatenation of three

contiguous on the flat surface—though these neighboring forms might represent objects at very different levels of depth in the visual field.” Rubin, *Picasso*, p. 51

¹⁴³ Rubin’s emphasis on the high horizon line and the building of the motif *outward* rather than into recession, were derived primarily from Kahnweiler’s work: “Cézanne’s technique is as follows: perspective is mostly conceived as if the spectator stands higher than the objects in the painting.” Rise, pp. 3-4. Kahnweiler describes Picasso’s work of 1909 as such, “Instead of beginning from a supposed foreground and going on from there to give an illusion of depth by means of perspective, the painter begins from a definite and clearly defined background. Starting from the background the painter now works toward the front by a sort of scheme of forms in which each object’s position is clearly indicated, both in relation to the definite background and to other objects.” Rubin, “Cézannisme,” p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Arris connotes primarily a “forward edge of volume” as Steinberg puts it, quoting John Elderfield. Steinberg, “Resisting Cézanne,” p. 133.

dimensional form onto the flat surface of the canvas, establishing ambiguous relations between convexity and concavity: for example, the arrises that proliferate across the torso of the Met's *Nude in an Armchair* (Figure 1.10) picture the sensuous curve from collarbone to breast as either a kind of pyramid, peaking above the cubic nipple, or a schematic vanishing point into concavity. For Steinberg, therefore, in Picasso's work, "an irregular lattice of arrises emerges as the condition of three-dimensionality in symbolic form."¹⁴⁶ This lattice acts simultaneously as a principle of spatial connectivity (emphasizing the shared border between discontinuous objects and spaces) and disconnectivity (breaking up the body so that the smooth transition of tone effected by chiaroscuro is imagined as a sharp linear rupture). The ultimate effect of "seeing arriswise," as Steinberg puts it, is to construct forms that, for all their apparent solidity and tectonic structure in 1909, are ultimately "approximate," "*ad hoc*," "provisional incarnations."¹⁴⁷ Steinberg suggestively notes, "Picasso meditates on optical disconnectives until the linear markings of planar change become his disembodied sign system. The arris—abstracted symbol—becomes the lone exponent of mass, to dominate at last even the Cubist masterworks of 1910-11."¹⁴⁸

Indeed, by the spring of 1910, the task of rigorously organizing the canvas into a network of arrises, a unified texture of linear and chromatic divisions, seemed to become quite literally disembodied, unable to suture a world of bodies and phenomena into the two-dimensional arena of representation. Two small sketches by Picasso, executed on a page of the neo-Symbolist journal *Pan: Revue libre*, directed by Jean Clary, seem to

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 128

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ For Steinberg, this principle of linear discontinuity puts Cézanne "at a great distance." *Ibid.*

allegorize this very process of bifurcation, which Picasso described as the “problematic” separation between painting’s “intrinsic value” and the “actual representation of objects” (Figure 1.16).¹⁴⁹ The bulk of the page is taken up with a charcoal sketch of a woman in an armchair, leaning her elbow on the back of the chair and propping her head with her fist, resulting in the torsion of the neck and downward tilt of the head, that familiar and melancholic pose worked through with serial intensity in 1909. These stylistic characteristics have suggested to some scholars that the page dates to early winter 1909.¹⁵⁰ The figure shares the page with an abstract quadrant of ink lines and curves, a sort of simple machine of pictorial levers and pulleys made up solely of arrises, as though Picasso had returned to this earlier drawing in 1910 seized with the belief that its sensuous plenitude could too be summarized in his new utopian shorthand.

However, the advertisement upon which these competing pictorial idioms are drawn appears only in one issue of *Pan*, published in March-April 1910, which puts both its drawings squarely in the months before Picasso began work on the *Saint Matorel* prints. In other words, the two images cannot be situated in a relation of logical (or heroic) succession, but were rather worked on perhaps simultaneously: taking up the majority of the page, the body has the look of a flayed figure, an *écorché* of the sort that allegorized painterly dissection since Titian’s *Flaying of Marsyas*; yet this figure is

¹⁴⁹ This *Pan* is not to be confused with the important German magazine *Pan*, in which Mallarmé had published his most hermetic late poem “*A la nue accablante tu*” in Spring 1895.

¹⁵⁰ It is dated to “early 1909,” that is to say, prior to the works from the summer at Horta in Weiss’ recent catalogue of Picasso’s Fernande portraits. This pose, typical of Picasso’s portraits of Fernande Olivier of Summer 1909 was, as Jeffrey Weiss contends, a privileged repository for melancholic affect, in which it is unclear if the motif gained in intensity with repetition, or was threatened with dispersal and dissolution. Weiss reminds us that “in the context of portraiture, the full weight of this operation [the magnified embodiment of two actions, rotation and tilt] is also being made to turn on a motif—the lowered head—that draws undeniable affective power from a long iconographical and allegorical tradition, one pertaining above all to the representation of melancholy.” Weiss, “Fleeting and Fixed,” p. 14-15

haunted in its margins by an analytical schemata that perhaps diagrammatizes the bidirectional torsion of the neck into the two parallel sets of right-angled intersections. Rather than conceive the ink compound in the corner as “structuring” the figure, with its charcoal lovingly smudged by Picasso’s figure, it is perhaps more accurate to read the page as an image of non-coincidence, a rift in the organic compound of representation and structure that could have been little other than painful for the artist. Indeed, it is at this moment in spring 1910, as Rosalind Krauss argued in her important analysis of Picasso’s *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, that “the carnal objecthood of the model was withdrawing progressively and that its loss was felt not as a triumph but as a kind of poignant tragedy.”¹⁵¹ This disappearance of the sensuous dimensions of depth and touch to sight, however, also marked, in Picasso’s work, a “watershed” (another synonym for *arris*): the entry into a “proto-linguistic” field, in which, as Krauss describes it, “absence is not what depletes and saps the system of representation but rather what makes it possible.”¹⁵²

This section has traced the process by which the preoccupation with pictorial structure, the efforts to map the surface of the canvas into an integrated system of relations—from *Bread and Fruit Dish* in 1908 to the portraits and landscapes of Horta in summer 1909 onward to the spring of 1910—led to the point where painting, tragically or heroically, “bracketed” itself off or “suspended” its own means of access to the world. The investigation of these means led to the “disenchantment” of Cadaqués, in which the “structures of depiction [were experienced] as purely contingent, nothing but devices,” as

¹⁵¹ Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” in Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, p. 271

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 262-3.

T.J. Clark suggested.¹⁵³ The device of the arris, which both articulated the pivot point between distinct identities and fractured spatial continuities, itself became “autonomized” at this moment, as I will show. The “abutment” became mobile, transformed into a kind of exportable unit to be shifted, transposed, and given any number of functions. This principle of mobility set into play by absence marks the entry of painting into the realm of “arche-writing,” in Derrida’s terms, or the “proto-linguistic” or “proto-semiological,” as Krauss and Bois argued. It was also, I will demonstrate, the touchstone of the culturally and historically endogenous theory of writing developed by Mallarmé.

La Brisure: Cadaqués and Mallarmé

Perhaps thinking of Mallarmé, the writer Roger LaPorte suggested to Derrida an alternative to his neologism *différance*, the solution to his dream of “finding a single word for designating difference and articulation”: “This word is *brisure* ‘—broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment, —Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work. The hinge, the *brisure* [folding-joint] of a shutter. Cf. Joint.”¹⁵⁴ In the spirit of Laporte’s suggestion, I would propose “hinge” or *brisure* as an alternative to Steinberg’s arris—preferable also to the many alternatives he suggests along the associative axis—to describe the network of linear abutments that attain an abstract independence in Cadaqués. The word preserves the notion that the principle of structural connectivity represented by Picasso’s “scaffolding” of arrises is also simultaneously a principle of disconnection, suggesting the potential for reversal,

¹⁵³ T.J. Clark “Cubism and Collectivity,” *Farewell to an Idea*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 220.

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 65.

mobility and “unhinging.” That this word was key for Mallarmé must have secured its appeal for LaPorte—a devotee of Blanchot—and Derrida. Mallarmé, we shall see used the term, as early as *Igitur*, to indicate a vision of the linguistic sign attaining a volatile mobility between meaning and non-meaning, “a vague quivering of thought, a luminous *brisure*” (OCI 483).

The “hinge” also points to a central formal device within Picasso’s cubism, and, if anything, risks being taken too literally or “referentially.” If *Bread and Fruit Dish* achieved the emptying out of narrative for a mode of formal process, it also provided to Picasso a shape or *Gestalt* that would run through the following years like a red thread. The hinged drop-leaf table in this painting stakes out a curved section of a circle, not quite a half-moon, and sets it flush with the flat of the picture plane. This shape also appears directly above, reversed, as though reflected in the distance, in the loaf of bread, collapsing depicted and real flatness (to borrow Clement Greenberg’s terms).¹⁵⁵ One could trace this form’s itinerary from *Bread and Fruit Dish* to the curved wedge marking out the incidence of shoulder and collarbone in *Girl with Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*. The form returns with serial intensity in 1912, as Picasso experiments with constructed sculpture and collage, appearing as the curved edge of the errant cardboard table attached to the *Guitar* construction of 1912, or as the black crescent at the bottom of the first *papier collé*, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass* (“*La Bataille s’est engagé*”) (Figure 1.17). In this latter work, the curve’s formal elasticity allows it to function as the bottom of the guitar, that guitar’s shadow upon a flat table, or (in a full circle back to the Basel painting) the drop-leaf of this table seen frontally.

¹⁵⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Collage,” in *Art and Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965, pp. 70-83.

This half-moon or “abstract sickle” as Kasimir Malevich called it, was a hallmark of what Bois has called Picasso’s “proto-semiological stage,” running from the indexical division of the canvas in *Three Women* on to the fully-fledged displacement of iconicity by the differential principle of value in the *papiers collés* of 1912.¹⁵⁶ For Bois, Picasso was engaged “in defining the minimum level of semantic articulation a shape is obliged to perform to be read as a sign.”¹⁵⁷ In this “search for a unitary mode of notation,” Picasso reduced drawing to a limited stable of marks and shapes in order to maximize the elasticity of the sign.¹⁵⁸ First explored in the double contours that proliferate in Picasso’s work from 1908—such as the single line that defines both the edge of a pear and the bowl of a glass in *Fruits et verre* (DR cat. 203), fall 1908—Bois writes that “It is at Cadaqués that Picasso will further define the sickle, with the etchings for *Saint Matorel*, one can see him playing this new mode of fragmentation against the rigidity of the grid as early as the spring of 1910.”¹⁵⁹

Indeed, the sickle, or lemon wedge, percolates throughout the body of *Mlle Léonie (Standing Figure)* (Figure 1.3), carving out the collarbone and left shoulder with schematic shading, and then, truncated and canted in the opposite direction, marking the curve of the right hip. The cascading rhythm is echoed in the half-moon of the knee, the

¹⁵⁶ Malevich described the conjunction of an incomplete section of a circle with a line cutting through it as a sickle characteristic of cubism in Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*. Trans. Howard Dearstyne. Chicago: P. Theobald, 1959, p. 41. See Bois’ discussion of this form in Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” pp. 182, 186.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182-3. The Cadaqués *Standing Nude* drawing owned by Alfred Stieglitz (Zervos, *Picasso v. II*, cat. 201) is a particularly striking example of Picasso’s deployment of the “abstract sickle” against the framework of a nearly orthogonal grid. See Rosalind Krauss’ discussion of this drawing following the semiological principle of the marked/unmarked sign in Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” in Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, p. 212

more rectilinear “sickle” of the left breast and the hinge of the arm and shoulder; it even forms the right eye and what is perhaps a buckle of hair immediately adjacent to it. In two related works, a painting and a drawing, from spring 1910, both retroactively titled *Mademoiselle Léonie* (Figure 1.18 and Figure 1.19), the sickle likewise forms part of a structural compound schematizing the wispy curl of hair at the side of a figure’s head into a meeting of two lines at a right angle connected by a sickle at the intersection point.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the formal structure in the *Léonie* drawing and the presumably contemporaneous marginal ink sketch on the page of *Pan*, are nearly identical in composition, both built up of the same reduced vocabulary of signs (Figure 1.16).

For another example from the *Saint Matorel* prints, one could point to the compositional function and placement of the two dominant “sickles” in, on the one hand, the shoulder and hip of *Mlle Léonie (Standing Figure)* and, on the other, the lip of a glass at upper-left and the seemingly non-referential curve at middle right in *La Table* (Figure 1.4). In these two prints, it is no longer possible to trace a linear passage from a represented object to its structuration; one witnesses, rather, a multi-directional migration of structural elements from one image or work to another, a movement by which formal elements unhinge themselves from their identities and attach themselves provisionally to new ones. In other words, the network of *brisures* no longer abstracts from a given motif or structures a fixed object, but secures a generalized principle of the “transmigration of

¹⁶⁰ The figures are DR cat. 340 and Zervos, *Picasso v. XXVIII*, cat. 2. When Daix asked Picasso about the title of the painting (and its study), he said only that Max Jacob (rather conveniently) thought that his painting “resembled” the character Léonie. DR p. 254. Rosselet also cites one of the first owners of the work who claims that the painting is of an acrobat named Léonie in the Medrano circus (DR p. 254). Richardson repeats this notion on Richardson, p. 146.

forms,” as Rubin puts it, in which a “disembodied sign system” (per Steinberg) can be deployed in any number of fragile constellations.¹⁶¹

As early as “In the Name of Picasso” (1980), Krauss compared Picasso’s *papiers collés* to the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure on the basis of two shared presuppositions: first, the “notion of absence as one of the preconditions of the sign,” in which the duality of a sign (uniting the material signifier and immaterial signified) refers through the “eclipse or negation of its material referent”; and, second, that the relation between signs operates differentially: whereas “a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up..., in language there are only differences *without positive terms.*”¹⁶² These two principles are precisely the terms of the Mallarméan dialectic of transposition and structure. Investigating Mallarmé’s understanding of the contingency of language in relation to, on the one hand, Saussure’s semiology, and, on the other hand, Picasso’s cubism of 1910 will have the benefit of, first, reconstructing a philosophy of language that was endogenous to Picasso’s world; and, second, one that was forged in the realm of aesthetics rather than in the sciences of language.

Perhaps Mallarmé’s most important statement of linguistic principles is to be found, once again, in “Crisis of Verse.” After a discussion of the *vers libre* poets who claimed him as their “maître,” Mallarmé wrote, in a passage worth quoting at length,

Languages imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking... The diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from proffering words that would otherwise be, when made uniquely, the material truth... Beside *ombre*, which is opaque, *ténèbres* is not very dark;

¹⁶¹ Cited above.

¹⁶² See the discussion of Saussure and Picasso in Rosalind Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 33-38

what a disappointment, in front of the perversity that makes *jour* and *nuit*, contradictorily, sound dark in the former and light in the latter. Hope for a resplendent word glowing, or being snuffed out, inversely, so far as simple light-dark alternatives are concerned—*Only*, be aware that *verse would not exist*: it philosophically, makes up for language’s deficiencies, as a superior supplement (D 205-206).¹⁶³

In this passage, Mallarmé advanced a theory of the thoroughly arbitrary nature of the sign, twenty years before the appearance of Saussure’s posthumous *Course in General Linguistics*.¹⁶⁴ Mallarmé cited the multiplicity of human idioms as the proof of the impossibility of an “absolute” language where the link between words and meanings would be necessary not contingent, a claim that stands among the “first principles” of Mallarmé’s poetics (and not, as some persist in claiming, as a condition of everyday speech that the poet deplored).

However, this first example of the diversity of tongues seems to open Mallarmé to charges of “nomenclaturism,” the fallacy criticized by Saussure that imagines languages as a set of names (varying in different idioms) for a stable set of pre-linguistic meanings and things.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the great achievement of Saussurean linguistics was not to have

¹⁶³ In *Les Mots Anglais*, Mallarmé gives another example: “It is in this way that HEAVY seems to abandon the very sense of *heaviness* [*lourdeur*] that it denotes to furnish HEAVEN, *le ciel*, lofty and subtle, considered as a spiritual stay.” OCII 966.

¹⁶⁴ Mallarmé’s training in linguistics will be discussed in Chapter Two, but for now it is worth noting that, while it is highly unlikely that the poet would have read Saussure’s first book on Indo-European grammar from the early 1880s, he was acquainted with the work of Franz Bopp and Michel Bréal. For Foucault, the word in Bopp’s linguistics evinced a transformation parallel to those augured by Cuvier in the life sciences and Ricardo in political economy. In Bopp’s study of Sanskrit, “needless to say, [the word] does not cease to have a meaning and to be able to ‘represent’ something in the mind that employs or understands it; but this role is no longer constitutive of the word in its very being, in its essential architecture, in what enables it to take its place within a sentence and to link itself there with other more or less different words.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 305.

¹⁶⁵ Jakobson accused Saussure himself of falling prey to this fallacy with his initial examples of the principle of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. For Saussure, “The idea of ‘sister’ is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds *s-ö-r* which serves as its signifier in French; that it could be represented equally by just any other sequence is proved by differences among languages and by the very existence of different languages: the signified ‘ox’ has as its signifier *b-ö-f* on one side of the border and *o-k-s* (*Ochs*) on the other.” Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General*

pointed out that names for things are conventional and not natural—this was known already by Aristotle¹⁶⁶ and doubtlessly intuited by innumerable language-users when encountering a foreign tongue, slang, jargon, or code. Rather, the principle of arbitrariness was operative for Saussure not only between signs and their referents, but, more profoundly, between the signifier and the signified, and was therefore *internal to the sign itself*. Signs are not more or less conventional names for pre-existent and stable things: rather, the sign exists only as an unstable compound of signifier and signified, mutually carved out of the amorphous field of non-signifying sound and from that “vague, uncharted nebula” of pre-linguistic cognition.¹⁶⁷

However, Mallarmé’s next move was to point to the difference between the sound of a word and its meaning, rooting him directly in the territory of semiotic “value” described by Saussure, rather than that of reference.¹⁶⁸ The “prohibition” against the

Linguistics, Trans. Wade Baskin, New York: Philosophical Library, 1959, pp. 67-68. Jakobson retorts that “This theory would have us believe that different languages use a variety of signifiers to correspond to one common and unvarying signified, but it was Saussure himself who, in his *Course*, correctly defended the view that the meanings of words themselves vary from one language to another. The scope of the word *boeuf* and that of *Ochs* do not coincide.” Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, Hassocks: Harvester, 1978, 111. On Jakobson’s relation to Saussure, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers*, New York: Zone Books, 2013, pp. 136-137.

¹⁶⁶ The opening of Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias* [On Interpretation] puts the matter clearly: “Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images.” The first step to understanding what Saussure meant by the arbitrariness of the sign is to distinguish this from Aristotle’s discussion of arbitrary and variable names for a consistent and stable set of “experiences” and “things,” as I go on to explain. Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. WD Ross, vol. 1, *De Interpretatione*, trans. EM Edghill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, p. 16a.

¹⁶⁷ Saussure, *Course*, p. 112

¹⁶⁸ Saussure develops the notion of value to respond to the “risk [of] reducing language to a simple naming-process.” *Ibid.*, p. 114. “Value” acknowledges the fact that languages do not establish names for pre-linguistic phenomena, but establish systems of signs that “limit each other reciprocally,” carving out meaning differently in different idioms, *Ibid.*, p. 116. Saussure’s classic example is that the distinction in English between *mutton* (for edible meat) and *sheep* (for the living creature) simply does not exist in French, which uses the word *mouton* to refer to both the meat and the animal: therefore one can say that the “value” of the French word is higher, insofar as it has to account for the meaning that is divided among two

linguistic absolute stems also from the asymmetry between a word's sonority—its “*coloris et allure*”—and its expressive or denotative function, a “fault” which exists, Mallarmé coyly notes, “among the languages and sometimes within one.” A French speaker distinguishes between *ombre* (shade/shadow) and *ténèbres* (darkness), on the basis of more than the mere relative presence and absence of light. While either might be appropriate to describe a dark room cloaked in shadow, *ombre* could designate a spot of dappled sun under a tree on a sunny day, but *ténèbres* could not, reserved as it is for the darkest of darknesses. Further, in the French Judeo-Christian tradition *ténèbres* is loaded with metaphysical meaning from the opening of Genesis, where prior to God's creation of light, “*il y avait des ténèbres à la surface de l'abîme*” (“darkness was upon the face of the deep”). Therefore, the question of the *referent* merely confuses the issue, as each sign seems not only to carve up degrees of the same physical phenomenon, but also to apportion metaphorical or even metaphysical associations. In this case, Saussure insisted on the necessity of putting the question of reference to one side and to speak instead of *differential value*: *ombre* and *ténèbre* do not merely point to independent phenomena or pre-existing concepts, they “limit each other reciprocally” in a structure of relations and differences, as Saussure put it, and were one term to disappear from the French language, the other would have to absorb the difference in value.¹⁶⁹

Mallarmé noted with ironic disappointment—the possibility of irony itself marks a shift in tone between his metaphysical crisis of the 1860s and the mature works of the

words in English. One can also imagine if English possessed only the word “fear” to account for the range of experiences that are differentiated by words such as anxiety and terror. In this case, the value of “fear” would be high, as it would have to encompass the experience of taking an exam as well as entering a war zone.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

90s—that the mutual delimitation of the sound-figure or signifier and the concept or signified always constitutes the sign as an asymmetrical, indeed internally volatile, assemblage. Contrary to their differential values, *ombre* sounds “opaque” to Mallarmé’s ear, while *ténèbres* is not so dark (“*se fonce peu*”). This “perversity” which pits sound and sense against one another goes as far as total inversion in the case of *nuit* (night), which sounds bright, and *jour* (day), which sounds dark. Citing this formulation by Mallarmé, Roman Jakobson stated, “When, on testing, for example, such phonemic oppositions as grave versus acute, we ask whether /i/ or /u/ is darker, some of the subjects may respond that this question makes no sense to them, but hardly one will state that /i/ is the darker of the two.”¹⁷⁰ These sorts of consonances or discrepancies typically go unnoticed in everyday speech, but become glaring to the poet occupied with the texture of the signifier. Mallarmé, contrary to what is sometimes asserted, in no way sought to make meaning and sound coincide in a sort of onomatopoeic procedure.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Mallarmé’s claim that poetry *would not exist* were it not for the arbitrariness of the sign

¹⁷⁰ Jakobson notes that the case is inverted in Russian, where “day” (день /d.en/) possesses an acute or “diurnal” vowel, while “night” (ночь /noč/) possesses a grave or “nocturnal” vowel. Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” *Selected Writings, vol. III: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1981, p. 44-5. In some ways the connections built in this chapter merely flesh out the intellectual world lived by Roman Jakobson in the years when he was close with Velimir Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky and accompanying Malevich to Sergei Schukin’s collection of Cubist pictures: Jakobson translated Mallarmé’s late sonnets into Russian at age twelve, and noted that his linguistic thought was built upon the foundation of his encounter with Cubism, and developed shortly thereafter in his study of Husserl and Saussure. On Jakobson’s recollections of Cubism, see Jakobson, “Retrospect,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, The Hague: Mouton, 1962, p. 631. Although the influence of Saussurean semiology on Jakobson has been widely acknowledged, a slightly more surprising influence is that of Husserl: “It was then [c. 1910-15] that I came to read a philosopher that has had perhaps the greatest influence on my theoretical work, Edmund Husserl. His *Logical Investigations*... the second volume especially, dealt at length with language: this was my favorite reading.” Jakobson, *Russie Folie Poésie*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, p. 36. The link between Russian Formalism and Cubism has been developed most profoundly by Yve-Alain Bois in, for example, “The Semiology of Cubism,” p. 177-78, ft. 36-49

¹⁷¹ Christine Poggi made this assumption in the context of a comparison with Cubism, most explicitly in the discussion after Krauss’ “Motivation of the Sign.” There, Poggi states, “I believe that, for Mallarmé, one of the fundamental issues was the arbitrary nature of the sign, and the hope that in poetry one could overcome that by returning language to some kind of primordial essence.... He also attempts to use sounds associated with the imagery of the poem.” Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, pp. 289-290.

should be read literally, and not taken as a specious call for total motivation, the very myth that Mallarmé's entire body of theoretical writings sought to vitiate. What, then, could it mean to state that poetry offered a philosophical "supplement" to this ineradicable "deficiency" of language, viz. its profound contingency?

Given that the gap between signifier and signified is an innate or even necessary feature of language, then what options remain for poetry but to either seek vainly to pass over the materiality of the word for its meaning or to content oneself with sonorous wordplay? Indeed, Mallarmé was widely considered to epitomize the latter tendency, and was accused of such by writers including the young Proust, who published an essay "Against Obscurity" in the July 1896 issue of *La Revue Blanche* proposing Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as a counter-model to the Mallarméan proliferation of "vain sea shells, sonorous and empty."¹⁷² In the September 1896 issue of *La Revue Blanche*, Mallarmé responded with a prose piece entitled "The Mystery in Letters," which critiqued (without naming) Proust and Tolstoy as authors who "draw from an inkwell with no Night the vain layer of intelligibility" (D 232). While rejecting the veneer of lucidity sought by Tolstoy, Mallarmé also insisted that his mode of writing did not dispense with intelligibility for a "flight of abstraction" or a "fall of mere sound." Rather, he stated,

What pivot, in these contrasts, am I assuming for intelligibility? We need a guarantee—
Syntax— (D 235)

¹⁷² Marcel Proust "Contre l'Obscurité," *Revue Blanche* (Juillet 1896): p. 69. Although Proust does not name Mallarmé explicitly, the charge is obvious—or at least was so to Lucien Muhlfeld, who published a response to Proust's piece entitled "Sur la clarté," in which he compared Proust's objections to the "touching fragility" of the objections voiced in literary Salons to Mallarmé's *Prose pour des Esseintes* or *Une dentelle s'abolit*. Muhlfeld notes the ironic obscurity of Proust's own language, "Oh, Clarity, Clarity, what obscure stupidity is delivered in your name!" Muhlfeld, "Sur la clarté," *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Mallarmé's "syntax," however, often tended toward the "elliptical," as Soffici put it, or idiosyncratic (evinced by the very layout of this prose piece "daringly welcomed despite the initial dismay caused by their typographical disposition, by the kind, ready-for-anything *Revue Blanche*" [D 297]). The poet admitted as much soon afterward, "The sentence sounds like a distant stammering, repressed by the multiple use of incidents, but is composed and elevated up to some superior equilibrium, with the planned balancing of inversions" (D 235). Mallarmé's prose syntax, piling clause upon sub-clause, "repressed by the multiple use of incidents," disrupts the flow of reading, stammers, constantly pivoting and requiring re-appraisal and re-reading, with the ultimate aim, as he puts it, of providing a framework, a means to achieve equilibrium, for language to reveal itself, to "beat its wings." To Proust's accusation of obscurity, Mallarmé responded, "If anyone, surprised by its wingspan, looks for something to blame... it's just Language, playing" (D 235).

The logic of Mallarmé's syntactical structuring aimed to dramatize the linguistic play between destruction (transposition) and construction (structure):

Words, all by themselves, light each other up on many a facet [*à mainte facette*]... the center of vibratory suspense... so long as their mobility or principle lasts, being what is not said in speech: all eager, before they are extinguished to exchange a reciprocity of flames, or presented obliquely as a contingency. (D 235; OCII 233)

That is to say, the dialectic of transposition and structure in Mallarmé's poetry was oriented toward the sublation of the primordial "defect" of language, seeking to preserve, negate and realize its contingency.¹⁷³ What is "guaranteed" by syntax, then, is the fragile and contingent "mobility" of the word, as Mallarmé constructed precarious linguistic architectures around points of sonorous ambiguity, providing to the reader the

¹⁷³ I use this language advisedly, and investigate Mallarmé's relation to Hegel in Chapter 2.

scintillating perception—lasting perhaps only for a moment—of the duality of the sign, with the word’s abstract and material sides reflecting one another and oscillating before the reader’s eyes “before they are extinguished” (D 235).

In the famous *Sonnet en -yx*, which was originally titled “Sonnet allegorical of itself,” and worked on between 1868 and 1887, Mallarmé described an empty room, a window through which *Ursa Major* is visible, and, sitting on a credenza, a mirror that reflects the empty room, the window, and the constellation, each nested together like a Russian doll encompassing the domestic and the cosmic: Mallarmé, “genius of mirrors,” as Walter Benjamin put it.¹⁷⁴ The entire poem, further, is structured in alternating rhymes between the dark “-or” sound and the bright “-yx” sound, leading Mallarmé to the point of inventing a neologism “*ptyx*” dictated purely by the requirements of rhyme and syllabic count¹⁷⁵:

Sur les crédences, au salon vide: nul ptyx,
Aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore,
(Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx
Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s’honore).

[On the credenzas, in the empty salon, no ptyx
Abolished bauble of sonorous inanity
(For the master has gone to plumb tears in the Styx
That sole object with which the Void honors itself).] (OCI 37)

Poetry, here, is allegorized as a procedure that abolishes objects in the process of transposing them into the musicality of sound; yet, bound to the rigid patterning and ordering of syllables, the texture of the signifier, the very locus of the arbitrary, attains a

¹⁷⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 538

¹⁷⁵ Mallarmé wrote to Eugène Lefébure in May 1868, “Enfin, comme il se pourrait toutefois que, rythmé par le hamac, et inspiré par le laurier, je fisse un sonnet, et que je n’ai que trois rimes en *ix*, concertez-vous pour m’envoyer le sens réel du mot *ptyx*, ou m’assurer qu’il n’existe dans aucune langue, ce que je préférerais [*sic*] de beaucoup afin de me donner le charme de le créer par la magie de la rime.” Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 386

materiality and an opacity that allows it to put it the Void on display, to raise it from the latent to the patent.¹⁷⁶ Here, Mallarmé’s quest for a word that means literally nothing, produced by the play of language, is the “subject” of the poem, as well as its procedure. Within the poem’s non-semantic “sonority,” Mallarmé hoped, the Void—the principle of absolute arbitrariness uniting a universe without God and a language without access to the “absolute”—would honor itself: this is evinced even in the homonymy between *le Néant s’honore* (the void honors itself) and *le Néant sonore* (the sonorous void). The “Maître” is a virtual stand-in for the *mètre* (the alexandrine meter) assiduously respected in this sonnet, yet cast into the river Styx (another *hymen* or liminal space between being and nothingness). The sonorous void “*ptyx*,” is paradoxically the moment where the allegorical function of the poem is concentrated: this word that suspends all referentiality stands for Mallarmé’s “empty sonnet which reflects itself in every manner... representing as it can, the Universe...”¹⁷⁷

Without claiming that Picasso knew it well—although anyone with a serious interest in Mallarmé in 1910 would be aware of the notorious *Sonnet en -yx*, as it was collected in several editions since 1893¹⁷⁸—the poem’s play of reflections shares not only a motif but, more importantly, a procedure with Picasso’s etching *La Table* (from *Saint Matorel*) (Figure 1.4) and its associated painting, *The Dressing Table*, completed in September 1910 (DR cat. 356, Figure 1.20). Defying the logic of linear progression—either from study to finished work, or from work to reproduction—the print and painting

¹⁷⁶ See the exemplary reading of “*Ses pures ongles*” with which P. Adams Sitney opens his book *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 5-11.

¹⁷⁷ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 392-393.

¹⁷⁸ It was published in his 1887 collection photo-lithographed *Poésies*, the 1893 collection *Vers et Prose*, and, in its definitive version, the Deman edition of the *Poésies* from 1899.

instead set into motion a play of exchange, mirroring, and reversal.¹⁷⁹ The first thing to note is that the orientations between the two works are reversed: the key poking out of a drawer at the bottom of the print faces right, while it pokes to the left in the painting; what one could venture to call a glass at the center left of the etching, with rectangular base and half-moon lip curving up toward the left corner, is transposed to the center right of the canvas. Although it was typical of Picasso to simply ignore the process of reversal that occurs between the marks made on the etching plate and the work printed on paper, the reversal between the painting and the etching cannot be explained away so easily.¹⁸⁰ The painting has a mirror at its apex, a luminous rectangle, canted on hinges supported by posts at either side that is absent in the print (indeed, Kahnweiler doesn't name a *glace* in the pictorial inventory sent to Kramář, only a "framed photograph").¹⁸¹ If one considers the possibility, suggested by Rubin, that the print preceded the painting, the addition of the painted mirror might signal Picasso's canny decision to paint the image as he drew it on the plate, rather than how it was printed. But, even further, if one supposes that Picasso worked on the images relatively simultaneously, it becomes possible to imagine

¹⁷⁹ The question of chronological priority between the two works has been subject to debate, but since Picasso put the finishing touches on the *Matorel* prints upon his return to Paris in the Fall, and the painting can be most plausibly dated to this period, it is reasonable to consider them as relatively simultaneous. Zervos dates the painting to Spring 1910, which would render the print a reproduction. Likewise, Geiser and Baer, in their catalogue of prints, state unequivocally, "the painting without a doubt precedes the engraving." Baer and Geiser, p. 59. Rubin, in *Pioneering Cubism*, like Baer and Geiser, dates the print to August 1910, in Cadaqués, but puts the painting in Autumn 1910, making the print a kind of preliminary study. See Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 179.. Daix, for his part, remains agnostic on the question of priority, dating both to the Cadaqués sojourn of Summer 1910. DR p. 81, cat. 356.

¹⁸⁰ On Picasso's play with reversals in printmaking, see Bourneuf, "Picasso, Braque, and the Uses of the print, 1910-1912," and Rubin, "Narrative to Iconic," p. 624.

¹⁸¹ *The Dressing Table* is the first appearance of the motif of the mirror that, as Krauss demonstrated, took on a central importance for the *papiers collés* of 1914. In her reading of *Pipe and Sheet Music*, Spring 1914 (DR cat. 683) Krauss suggests that the wallpaper frame is a mirror, advancing the possibility that the pipe and sheet music in the work are themselves a *papier collé* pinned to stippled wallpaper reflected *behind* the viewer. Krauss, *Picasso Papers*, pp. 180-181

that the etching and the painting are reversed because the etching *is a mirror* that reflects the scene laid out in the painting below its depicted mirror.

The “*miroitement*” of this Mallarméan closed circuit continues within the painting itself, which is structured as a network of reflections, repetitions, refractions and reversals. While doubtlessly the most complete and naturalistically rendered object in the painting, for many viewers the glass just below the mirror presents itself only after a prolonged period of looking—first noticeable perhaps through the inverted T of its base and stem (Figure 1.21). This invisibility is due to the contiguity of its contours with the nearly orthogonally gridded lines that make up the majority of the surface. For example, directly to the left of the glass is the rectangular face of a drawer, marked out by the handle or small key at its center (and indeed, almost at the center of the canvas). The front of the drawer shares its right vertical edge with the left contour of the glass, and the line of its bottom horizontal edge is continuous with that of the bowl (they are distinguished only by the contrast between the light tone of the glass and the darkness of the wood). The effect is that one can choose to see either the glass or the drawer, or both at the same time. They are mutually implicated to the point of structural ambiguity: perhaps the drawer has been pulled out, and the bottom horizontal is not part of the glass but the side of the drawer’s foreshortened extension into space—a reading corroborated by the stem’s upward continuation past what initially reads as the base of the bowl.¹⁸²

¹⁸² The base of the glass, and the shape produced by the seeming continuation of the stem into the bowl, call attention to the repetition of the stem and handle form, a kind of iconicized version of the sickle across the painting: most noticeably in the key at bottom, but also in the drawer’s knob to the left of the glass, and to its direct right in what might be the handle to another drawer or (more whimsically) the key to a music box with another stem facing vertically to its right; echoed also in the play of hinges holding up the mirror. Confirming the “mobility” of this structural unit, the form also appears throughout Picasso’s sketches of the Fishing Smacks at Cadaqués, as the anchors or knobs to which ropes are tied on sailboats [Zervos, *Picasso*, vol. XXVII, cat. 6; Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 162]

Focusing on the *Gestalt* of the glass, continuing up either of its sides, we notice that it likewise possesses two mutually exclusive openings at top: a curved lip as in the print, and a right angle above it that cannot be made, even through the greatest feats of “assimilation,” to form a single continuous rim. Perhaps the curved line indicates the meniscus of the water’s surface near the rectilinear opening of the glass above? Having paid this much attention to such a small area of pictorial information, one may have noticed the long object dipped into the glass, which is absent from the print: a toothbrush, Daix tells us, with its bristles plunged into the water and its handle sticking out, refracted into discontinuity by the curved waterline, and again, less dramatically, by the lip of the glass.¹⁸³ The brush itself is reflected and compressed by the curved interior of the glass’ right side—the bristles seem to touch their own reflection like a set of chattering toy teeth—in a moment of local illusionism that stands out in the generalized confusion with all the force of a virtual image reflected in one of Chardin’s tureens.

In *The Dressing Table*, the locked contours between discrete objects both lend forms the appearance of structural necessity *and* dissipate them, both turn the surface into a total system of carefully calibrated relations *and* obscure the objects caught in the play of reflections and refractions. The blank luminosity of *The Dressing Table*’s mirror, where thick daubs of white paint partially efface traces of linear drawing below, stands for painting itself as a negative reflection of the world of sensory experience. In this way, it operates like the mirror in Mallarmé’s “Sonnet et –yx,” which reflects the bourgeois interior “*dans l’oubli fermé par le cadre*,” abolishing and virtually remaking the objects within, a metaphor for the process of *transposition* into language as a system of differential relations without access to positive existence. Just as, with Mallarmé, the

¹⁸³ DR, p. 257

destructive power of language required the dialectical counter-balance of an ever-more-stringent emphasis on its materiality, so too, in Picasso's cubism, the analysis of the structure of depiction prevented painting from giving itself over completely to the force of de-realization. The destruction of the represented object leads to the objectification of the work of art: as Blanchot put it, in Mallarmé's hands, "The real presence and material affirmation of language give it the ability to suspend and dismiss the world... [Language] must become like things in order to break our natural relationships with them."¹⁸⁴ In Mallarmé and Picasso, representation destroys the object in order to proclaim its own mute materiality, and, thereby, to regain an authentic continuity with the world by becoming simply one more thing within it.

And yet... Despite their destructive aesthetic—"Destruction was my Béatrice" and "In my case, a painting is a sum of destructions"—neither Mallarmé nor Picasso were content with the plunge into silence or opacity. Mallarmé's poem about a blank page is not merely a blank page, and Picasso's *Dressing Table* is not Malevich's *White on White* (nor even less the *Black Square*). What remains after the "suspension" of the object-world—like a "distant stammering" or a "beating of the wings"—was the pure act of reading itself:

To read—
That practice—
To lean, according to the page, on the blank, whose innocence inaugurates it, forgetting even the title that would speak too loud: and when, in a hinge [*brisure*], the most minor and disseminated, chance is conquered word by word, unfailingly the blank returns, gratuitous earlier but certain now, concluding that there is nothing beyond it [*rien au-delà*] and authenticating the silence— (D 236)

¹⁸⁴ Blanchot, "Myth of Mallarmé," *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 37.

The “hinges,” or *brisures*, of poetic structure, the “minor and disseminated” play of inversions and pivots in Picasso’s painting, construct a structure that structures nothing, that organizes and authenticates a silence, within which the reader can confront “the intimate abyss of each thought” (D 233).¹⁸⁵ “Nothing will have taken place but the place,” as the poet’s last poem proclaimed—nothing, that is, other than “that practice” of reading. This very fact of *taking place*, of *taking time*, would perpetuate the emptiness into a “delay,” like a perpetually prolonged blink of an eye, an infinitely extended moment of ravishing suspension between the perception of a sign and its translation into meaning.¹⁸⁶ Reflected in the opaque white mirror of Picasso’s *Dressing Table*, the viewer would confront nothing but their own performance of seeing and reading, the very play of meaning making itself, hovering perilously close to the void.

Writing and World History: Kahnweiler contra Mallarmé

To return to the initial discussion, according to Kahnweiler, this temporalization of sense was Mallarmé’s lesson to the cubists: “It was their reading of Mallarmé that gave the cubist painters the audacity to freely invent *signs*, with the conviction that these

¹⁸⁵ This process is perhaps represented in Manet’s *Portrait of Mallarmé* from 1876, where the poet’s eye and hand are linked to the blank page, and the cigar, held like a quill over the page, emanates a wisp of smoke that dissipates into the chromatic expanse of the wallpaper and of the surface of the painting itself. The painting analogizes the poet’s act in almost precise terms that Mallarmé himself had used to describe Manet’s procedures, describing the painter “bent over the empty canvas, dazed, as if he had never painted before.” Mallarmé continues, “In one of my most vivid memories, I can picture him saying, ‘The eye, a hand...’ That eye—Manet himself—... could impart newness to any object and... could give every painting the freshness of a new encounter, virgin and abstract.... The clear, ready pressure of his hands as he clasped those of his subject told of the mystery into which the limpidity of his sight would plunge....” (D 98) In Mallarmé’s pithy conjunction, the painter’s hand becomes a tactile eye, the painter himself becomes an organ of sight, who, “bent over the empty canvas” transforms this emptiness into a new encounter “virgin and abstract.”

¹⁸⁶ This points toward the difference between Mallarmé and Husserl. After bracketing the “natural stance” and any existential thesis regarding the world, Husserl would have his transcendental ego find self-presence in a “living present,” while, for Mallarmé, the remainder of the reduction is precisely the *delay*, the pure process of difference.

signs *would become*, sooner or later, the objects signified for spectators” (CE 219). And yet, having studied the “vibratory suspense” that Mallarmé sought to construct between the two sides of the sign—the “hesitation between sound and sense,” as Valéry described it—we are in a position to remark upon the distance separating the poet from Kahnweiler on the question of writing.¹⁸⁷

Kahnweiler dealt at length with Mallarmé’s “influence” on the cubists in *Juan Gris: His Life and Work*, his aesthetic and historical treatise and theoretical summa, only secondarily about Gris the painter, published in 1946 and written during the war years. Kahnweiler quotes Mallarmé’s famous early statement, from a letter of 1864, in which he proclaimed that his poetic principle was “to paint, not the thing, but the effect that it produces” (JG 95).¹⁸⁸ While certain commentators cited this phrase to link Mallarmé with the Impressionists’ desire to transcribe nature’s ephemeral flux, Kahnweiler justly noted that Mallarmé’s “effect” has nothing to do with any “visual sensation,” nor indeed with the logic of naturalism at all.¹⁸⁹ Kahnweiler argued,

Humbly, and with superb patience, Mallarmé intended to set down in a rigidly pure art form only his sensation, leaving it to the reader’s imagination to re-create the object which had stimulated the poet’s emotion. Mallarmé’s chief concern was for the work of art in which this emotion was communicated to the reader... [The Impressionists] were completely oblivious of the *incantatory* character of his art, of his desire to *create* a reality. (JG 100)

¹⁸⁷ Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957, p. 637

¹⁸⁸ Cited from Mallarmé, *Correspondance.*, p. 206. Mallarmé went on to state a thesis rather typical of the Parnassian poets, but in contradiction to the principles of his mature work, writing, “Poetry must not be composed of words, but of intentions, and speech must efface itself before the sensation.” *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Kahnweiler convincingly dismissed Victor Hugo’s supposed description of Mallarmé as an “Impressionist poet” as apocryphal, and anachronistic in any case, since Mondor dates it to 1865, before Impressionism existed as such and before Mallarmé sloughed off his youthful imitation of Baudelaire and the Parnassians. JG, 208-9.

Here, then, is the crux of what unites Mallarmé and Cubism for Kahnweiler: The notion that art, liberated from the task of depicting exterior reality through the mimicry of sense impressions, could set about *creating* reality, but a reality more profound than that of the appearances of the empirical world, a transcendental reality operating in the reader's mind at the level of the *idea*.

In *Juan Gris*, Kahnweiler presented his “*aesthetica in nuce*,” as one section is titled, and argued that the “crucial moment” for all works of art, of all periods and cultures, was the “materialization” of the artist's “internal image”—a product of the “creative imagination” that is private and only for the artist—as it becomes an “external image,” given to others:

This is the origin of a work in paint, which, like all works of art, is a new object which has never existed before and which will always be unique. This entity has a two-fold existence. *It exists autonomously in itself, by itself and for itself, as an object: but outside itself it has a further existence—it signifies something.* Its lines and forms are there to compose certain signs, and by virtue of this the painting is a representation of thought by means of graphic signs—*writing* (JG 64).

The “origin of the work of art,” for Kahnweiler, is then, in the artist's mind. And yet, from the moment of its externalization, its materialization, the work of art reveals itself to be ontologically split between its autonomous objecthood—its existence as a thing in the world, a “tableau-objet”—and its communicative or signifying value. The term “writing” is crucial for Kahnweiler, because it allows him to insist that communication through painting does not *depend* upon mimesis or visual similarity with the outside world.

The painter in fact tries, through these signs, to reproduce his emotion in the imagination of the spectator by inducing a re-creation of the image which appeared in his own. He will succeed if the spectator ‘reads’ the picture. The spectator will then ‘see’ what the painter intended to represent: *he will have identified the sign with the object signified.* (JG 64)

Therefore, for Kahnweiler, the work of art's *telos*, the term upon which art succeeded or failed, was the "transmission of thought." The work of art concretized the thought or "emotion" of the painter, not through resemblance, but in the form of graphic signs, which allowed the spectator to imaginatively *create the object* that was the source of the painter's emotion for themselves, and, therefore, share the painter's emotion.

While his mobilization of the concept of "reading" for the reader/spectator's successful reconstruction of the object as seen and felt by the writer/painter was in place as early as 1910 for Kahnweiler, it is not until *Juan Gris* that he provided a fully fledged theory and history of language.¹⁹⁰ Kahnweiler began by distinguishing between two forms of "pragmatic writing" used for everyday communication: phonetic writing and ideographic writing. Against the prevailing view of the time, Kahnweiler asserted that "ideographic" languages like Chinese share no common root with phonetic languages like French.¹⁹¹ Kahnweiler's reason for insisting upon the absolute separation between "ideographic" and phonetic writing systems was that the former were "concrete languages," based on images and "deriv[ing] from painting," while the latter were "abstract languages" making use of "entirely arbitrary signs" based on "the idea" (JG 69). Trotting out the Eurocentric myth that ideographic writing "can be read by people who speak a different idiom," since signs are based upon resemblance to their referent,

¹⁹⁰ The earliest use by Kahnweiler of the words "reading" and "writing" with respect to painting—and cubist painting in particular—that I have been able to find are his letter to Kramar from 1910, and his interview with *Je sais tout* from 1912, both cited above.. The linguistic analogy is developed in *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik* (1914), but conflated awkwardly with terms and concepts drawn from Wilhelm Wundt, Bergson, and Kant. On Kahnweiler's inheritance from Wundt's psychophysiology, see Zeidler, *Defense of the Real*, pp. 116-121.

¹⁹¹ Kahnweiler cited Vendryes' claim that "ideographic writing... is at the root of every system of writing used by mankind" (JG 69). He advanced Siegfried Schott's work on the fundamentally "ideographic" nature of Egyptian writing as proving the thesis of two "divergent" paths toward the invention of writing (one from the image, one from the idea) (JG 69).

Kahnweiler argues conversely that “phonetic writings require ‘initiation’: they... are pure cryptography with no visual ‘key’” (JG 68).¹⁹² Corresponding to a “superior stage” of civilization, the development of phonetic writing requires “a special state of mind... to conceive of a possible identity between signs deliberately chosen and the thing they are meant to represent,” because it depends on a capacity for abstraction due to its use of wholly arbitrary signs (JG 68).

Because the “ideogram” derived from painting, Kahnweiler made a logical leap and extended the category of “writing” to all the visual arts (whether painting or sculpture), which he called “formative writing.”¹⁹³ To clarify the difference between the varieties of writing, Kahnweiler proposed a series of diagrams tracing their respective processes of message-transmission, with each progressing in a linear sequence from the first term downward: (JG 71-72)

<u>Formative Writing (i.e., painting)</u>	<u>Pragmatic Writing</u>	
	<u>Ideographic Writing</u>	<u>Phonetic Writing</u>
Graphic Sign	Graphic Sign	Graphic Sign
Image	Image	Vocal Sign
Vocal Sign	Idea	Idea
Idea	Vocal Sign	Image

The reader of phonetic writing translates the graphic sign into the vocal sign (which it transcribed) and passes directly to the idea. Only afterward is an image produced.

Conversely, ideographic writing begins with a graphic sign (a pictograph) that signifies through resemblance to its referent, and which facilitated the passage from the image to

¹⁹² In his research on Chinese writing, Kahnweiler evidently engaged with Marcel Granet’s *La Pensée chinoise*, Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1934. In many ways, Kahnweiler shares the mistaken presuppositions of Ernest Fenollosa regarding the wholly non-phonetic and pictographic character of Chinese writing, while valorizing phoneticism as a model for art (contra Fenollosa). See Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1918), New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

¹⁹³ “Writing, however, is always involved when thought is transmitted by graphic, or, for that matter, plastic signs. Thus, not only painting, but also sculpture, is writing.” (66)

the idea and, finally, to the “vocal sign” of a particular spoken idiom. Both forms of “pragmatic writing” eventually become conventionalized—even the “ideograph” with its putatively smaller degree of arbitrariness—in order to be used by a language-community, with the result that graphic signs are over time “reduced to abstractions, after which they become empty shells” (JG 74). A language-user encounters their system of “pragmatic writing” as an abstract and fixed externality, for “It is impossible to deliberately alter the nature of a language” (JG 74).¹⁹⁴

“Formative writing,” conversely, is endowed with *plasticity*, in the sense of being open to mutability and variation. A painting of a tree, to use Kahnweiler’s example, is made up of countless details (light conditions, time of day, number of leaves, color, season, *genus*, location, etc.) that “release a flood of impressions. What is read will not be a *word* but an *image* with its limitless possibilities... The painter tries to transmit images; the spectator first ‘reads’ them and then transforms them into ideas” (JG 71). Since the line to the idea is not “direct” (as Kahnweiler believes that it is with the vocal sign), nor subjected to conventionalization (as it is in both ideographic and phonetic writing), the painter is able to create new visual signs, which—after being “identified” by the viewer and named by the inner voice—can finally become ideas: “The image which appeared in the spectator’s mind on reading the graphic sign was translated into a word which became fixed as an idea” (JG 71). Therefore, the artist’s formative power allows for the perpetual

¹⁹⁴ For Kahnweiler, poetry represents the attempt, from within pragmatic writing, to regain the “formative” power that painting possesses intrinsically. With the priority of the image in Chinese writing, for example, Kahnweiler asserts that writing retains a mobility and freedom associated with “formative writing,” but that has been progressively effaced with the conventionalization of Chinese. Conversely, “The tendency inherent in phonetic languages is for words to be reduced to abstractions, after which they become empty shells.” Therefore, in the poetry of phonetic languages, the task is not to create new images, but “to restore meaning to words which have become stale through constant use.” (JG 74) Experiment such as Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, Kahnweiler noted, sought like ideographic writing, “to arrive directly at the image, for in phonetic writings, the message normally has to cross the no-man’s land of abstractions (vocal, sign, idea) before becoming an image.” (JG 74)

creation of visual signs that never remain stagnant but are ever-shifting: “The great painter invents new signs” (JG 72).

For Kahnweiler, the great artist’s ability to derive new and imaginative signs from the flux of visual experience, separated their “aesthetic vision” absolutely from the “pragmatic vision” of the majority of humanity. For the average person, Kahnweiler argued, vision is pragmatically yoked to tactility and the other senses, and employed as “an instrument whose use is limited to the acts of day to day existence” (JG 78). Rather than *reducing* the realm of the visible toward practical ends, however, the artist *expands* the visible by providing their culture or society with a means to surpass the bounds of pragmatic vision and to perceive their world anew: “It is only by sharing the vision of contemporary painting that the aesthetic vision achieves totality,” Kahnweiler stated. “He alone *sees* clearly and fully who is familiar with the painting of his time.” The painter’s task, therefore, is to “determine” through images “the world-image of the spiritual community to which he belongs” (JG 72). In this way, Kahnweiler proclaimed, “The old theory that plastic art is the mirror of the world must be reversed: *it is the outer world which is the mirror of plastic art.*” (JG 81)

With his idiosyncratic notion that the “world-image” is *produced* by artists, Kahnweiler reversed the terms of Karl Mannheim’s essay “On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*” (1921), which considered works of art as “cultural objectifications” of an epoch’s “global outlook,” viz. conscious or unconscious reflections of an underlying (ideological, epistemological, visual) base.¹⁹⁵ Kahnweiler’s view is also to be distinguished from Alois Riegl’s concept of the *Kunstwollen*, or artistic will, in which art

¹⁹⁵ See Karl Mannheim, “On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*,” *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Paul, 1972, pp. 33-83

manifests the network of mediations within a given society that “regulate man’s relationship to the sensorily perceptible appearance of things.”¹⁹⁶ For Riegl, “The character of this will is contained in that which we call the worldview (again, in the broadest sense): in relation to philosophy, science, even statecraft and law.”¹⁹⁷ While the “worldview” for Mannheim and Riegl was a form of historicism that sought to situate artistic production within broader cultural and historical paradigms, Kahnweiler insisted that the “worldview” of a culture is *made by artists*.¹⁹⁸

In his view that “the artist is not simply an individual, he is also the creative hand of the entire community,” Kahnweiler explicitly drew from the neo-Kantian philosophy of history proposed by George Simmel in the first decade of the twentieth century, who sought a total liberation from historicism.¹⁹⁹ Writing in 1905, Simmel repeated Kant’s question “How is nature possible?” with respect to history, and thereby sought to determine “the a priori dimension of historical knowledge.”²⁰⁰ For Simmel, after Kant, “In the cognition of nature, the formative influence of the human mind is generally recognized,” however, “for history this influence is less easily perceived because the

¹⁹⁶ Riegl noted, “All human will is directed toward a satisfactory shaping of man’s relationship to the world, in the most comprehensive sense of this word, within and beyond the individual.” Alois Riegl, “The Main Characteristics of the Late Roman *Kunstwollen* (1901),” in *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed Christopher Wood, New York: Zone Books, 2000, p. 95.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ On Riegl’s historicism, see Henri Zerner, “Alois Riegl, Art, Value, Historicism,” *Daedalus* v. 105, n. 1 (Winter 1976): p. 180.

¹⁹⁹ Kahnweiler, “Les limites de l’histoire de l’art,” in CE 75-78. In this essay, which constitutes an attempt to transfer the insights of George Simmel’s “The Problem of Historical Time,” (1916) from the field of neo-Kantian epistemology to that of art history, Kahnweiler notes that, on the one hand, style, this shared aesthetic will of a cultural epoch, is “accomplished” by the great individual artist, who “deviates from the traditional mode and inaugurates a new style”; yet, on the other hand, all works of art “bear the mark of their milieu.” “It is this character of *ensemble*,” Kahnweiler notes, “that permits the history of art to coordinate its matter and its insertion within Universal History.” (CE 80)

²⁰⁰ George Simmel, “How is History Possible,” *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 3

material of history is mind itself.” The “liberation from naturalism” that Kant won for transcendental consciousness by showing that the unity of nature is *produced by the human subject*, rather than the converse, would have to be achieved for the understanding of history: “Here, too, the mind forms the picture of *psychic existence* which we call history in sovereign wise, through categories that inhere in the knower alone. Man as something known is made by nature and history; but man, as knower, makes nature and history.”²⁰¹ Simmel hoped thereby to preserve “the freedom of the human spirit—that is, form-giving creativity—over against historicism” and to demonstrate that the “form in which all psychic reality comes to consciousness, which emerges as the history of every ego, is itself the product of the creative ego.”²⁰²

Kahnweiler’s theory of art (and) history was, like Simmel’s theory of history, based upon an “extended analogy with an extremely psychological reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” as Gillian Rose put it with respect to the latter.²⁰³ The faith in the “form-giving creativity” of the ego underpinned Kahnweiler’s theory of “formative writing,” which—in an analogy with the Kantian ego—constructs the very *being* of the world, its unity, rather than merely imitating its givenness. As he put it in “The Rise of Cubism,” “The artist, as the executor of the unconscious plastic will of mankind,

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 4-5

²⁰³ Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, London: The Athlone Press, 1981, p. 25. Zeidler, again, is illuminating on Kahnweiler’s neo-Kantianism, writing that “Circa 1900 for most people, especially German-language art historians, Kantianism was fundamentally about epistemology, hence about the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the physiological optics inspired by it, and not about judgments of taste, hence not about the *Critique of Judgment*. In fact, I consider it a sign of Kahnweiler’s autodidacticism that, unlike most everyone else, he devoted a fair amount of space to that third *Critique* in *The Object of the Aesthetic*—but the tension which does exist in that book, and which Bois rightly points out, will disappear in the *Rise of Cubism*, where questions of beauty take a backseat to epistemology.” Zeidler, *Defense of the Real*, p. 217

identifies himself with the style of the period, which is the expression of his will” (RC 15).

If this was true, however, for all historical periods, then what, for Kahnweiler, was the unique nature of Cubism? As Simmel noted, “historical realism,” “the view that the science of history should provide a mirror image of the past ‘as it really was,’” “commits no less an error than does realism in art, which pretends to copy reality without being aware how thoroughly this act of ‘copying’ in fact stylizes the contents of reality.”²⁰⁴ The break with the logic of realism achieved by Cubism in painting and by Mallarmé in poetry was ultimately, for Kahnweiler, congruent with the achievement of a worldview in which history and nature are the products of the creative ego, rather than its shackles. The “conceptual art” of the Cubists and of Mallarmé sought “to create ‘reality’ without recourse to imitation” (JG 128). But, like the Kantian consciousness which is *in nature and history* even while it *makes nature and history*, the cubists first had to attain a concept of the painting as an autonomous object in reality, with its own “independent existence” (JG 128). Rather than imitating the mere appearance of an object in the world, the cubists invented new “graphic emblems” derived from the very structures of visual perception, thereby securing the integrity of the Idea as the spectator was called to reconstruct it in their minds.²⁰⁵ Therefore, in “the exaltation of *art as the creation of the*

²⁰⁴ Simmel, “How is History Possible,” p. 3

²⁰⁵ This corresponds to the Neo-Kantian search for the grounds of “objective validity” for any object of knowledge or perception. In her important book on the Hegelian speculative critique of the neo-Kantian inheritance in sociology, Gillian Rose puts it this way: “Objective validity pertains to the synthesis of experience, but not to any knowledge of things-in-themselves. If the idea that the mind synthesizes the objects of knowledge is accepted, then it can be argued that it makes no sense to retain ‘reality’ for something beyond our knowledge. The production of objects may equally well be said to be the production of their reality, not of their appearance. According to this criticism, the hypothesis of things-in-themselves is otiose.” Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 4.

visible world,” Cubism would construct the world-picture for a critical age inaugurated in philosophy by Kant (JG 105).

Things, however, did not quite work out that way. Instead, to Kahnweiler’s great consternation, the Cubists lived through an age in which the intimate, formative link between the advanced work of art and the vision of its time has been ruptured. “In a normal, untroubled civilization,” Kahnweiler wrote, “the spectator can always ‘read’ the art of his time and recognize the outer world herein” (JG 79). Conversely, in a tragedy that, for Kahnweiler, took on world-historical dimensions, the twentieth century witnessed the “isolation of the painters from their contemporaries, a separation unparalleled in history” (JG 80). This separation disrupted the work of art’s very “biological function” to provide “graphic emblems” with which the human being “builds his outer world.” Instead, the lessons of Cubism were distorted by certain followers of “so-called ‘abstract painting,’” who produced “flat surfaces pleasantly decorated” and “calculated to titillate” (JG 86). This “error which has been disastrous for contemporary painting,” proposed that “it was enough ... to ‘like’ these new pictures without being concerned with what they represented.” (JG 86) The only “reason to hope” for an end to this isolation, Kahnweiler notes with discernible desperation, is the fact that “The modern poster, on which Léger has left his mark, the window displays and catalogues of the chain stores, are accustoming even the provincial spectator to the appearance of Cubist and later painting, thus slowly re-creating for him the outer world in the image of the new art” (JG 80).

Kahnweiler’s own *Weltanschauung* was steeped in the progressivist ideology of modernism, determined by a faith that history and art history should coincide in the

forward march of reason. But not only was Kahnweiler's conviction that the "new language" of painting would produce "in the minds of the spectator, the finished product of the assimilation," challenged on all sides by those who persisted in seeing *nothing at all* in cubism, but the historical optimism of his neo-Kantianism was belied on all sides by history itself. Indeed, his two major statements of aesthetic philosophy, expressing the utopian hope of a self-critical pictorial language to match an enlightened and self-critical epoch, were written during the most annihilating moments of crisis for bourgeois subjectivity: *The Object of the Aesthetic* and *The Rise of Cubism* were written in exile in Bern during the first World War, and *Juan Gris* was written "in the shadows of the gas chambers," as Kahnweiler put it, when, as a German Jew, he ceded his collection and his gallery to his sister-in-law Louise Leiris and went into hiding from the Nazis outside Paris.²⁰⁶ The empirical facts of this history are allowed to creep in to *Juan Gris* only in two footnotes: the first marking the death of Max Jacob, "one of my oldest friends... [who] was arrested at St. Benoit at the end of February 1944, and died, a victim of the crazy Hitlerian terror, in the concentration camp at Drancy on March 5, 1944" (JG 217, ft. 205); and the other, mourning the loss of Carl Einstein who "at the time of the invasion in May 1940... was interned by the French authorities in a camp in southwestern France. At the approach of the Germans he was released; but for fear of falling into the hands of the Gestapo he drowned himself in the River Gave and is buried at Pau" (JG 218, ft. 237). Kahnweiler's intransigent faith in the utopian interpenetration of art history and world history withstood even the eclipse of neo-Kantian philosophy itself in

²⁰⁶ Kahnweiler, *Mes galeries et mes peintres: Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 180-81.

the wake of the First World War by various strands of philosophical pessimism, nihilism, and historicism.²⁰⁷

The “unfinished” status of Picasso’s works from Cadaqués for Kahnweiler takes on its full significance when understood in relation to the conjunction between art, consciousness, and history that underpinned his worldview. So too does the status of Mallarmé for Kahnweiler, insofar as the poet embodied *both* the anxious delay in the process of assimilation *and* the “hope” of eventual reconciliation. Yet, while Kahnweiler could accept this temporal gap in the cognition of the Cubist object only as an unfortunate lag to be closed when humanity would finally recognize its historical world-picture in Picasso’s painting, Mallarmé’s poetry worked against this paradigm of “successful” communication at every step, conceiving the work of art as perpetually deferred into an uncertain future by dint of its own negation or withdrawal.

In closing, I turn once more to Maurice Blanchot, who, the very same year that Kahnweiler wrote *Juan Gris*, offered an alternate history of language that also culminated with Mallarmé. In a modest essay entitled “Research into Language,” Blanchot differentiated four historical stages in the evolution of the study of language. The first, epitomized by Plato and his contemporaries, proposed words as names for the objects of the sensible world. The second was the idealist model in which language constituted the medium between consciousness and the eternal realm of the Idea, the guarantee of our “entrance into the intelligible world.”²⁰⁸ Third, the “expressionist model” of Hegel and

²⁰⁷ See, Frederick Beiser, “German Philosophy and the Fate of Neo-Kantianism,” in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013, pp. 115-132. Most importantly, neo-Kantianism was discredited by the support of many of its strongest proponents for the War, with prominent philosophers Alois Riehl and Wilhelm Windelband signing the pro-war Manifesto of the 93. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁰⁸ Blanchot, “Studies on Language,” in *Faux Pas*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 87.

Leibniz (and, I would add, the historicist model of Riegl, for example) considered language itself as the embodiment of what is sayable, thinkable, and possible at any given historical junction, serving, therefore, as the medium of the progress of Spirit. Finally, the fourth stage was the “dialectical function of discourse,” in which language regained an “essential power of contestation” in the negativity of modern literature:

Literature seeks to revoke from language the properties that give linguistic signification, that make language appear as an affirmation of universality and intelligibility. But it doesn't arrive at this goal (if it arrives at this goal) by destroying language or through contempt of its rules. It wants to render language to what it believes to be its veritable destiny, which is to communicate silence through words and to express liberty through rules, which is to say to evoke language itself as destroyed by the circumstances that make it what it is.²⁰⁹

As Mallarmé put it, “the act of writing was scrutinized down to its origins” and what was discovered was not Husserl's “living presence” or Kahnweiler's “formative” power of the creative Ego, but the simple fact that “writing itself is out of place” (D 184). As he faced the blank mirror of Picasso's *Dressing Table* and found himself suddenly unable to read the art of his time, Kahnweiler could have found in Mallarmé a reason to keep peering into the void:

What is this good for—
For a game.
In light of a superior attraction like a void, we have the right to be lured on by nothingness...
As for me, I ask no less of writing, and I'm going to prove it. (D 187)

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90. Translation modified, from Blanchot, “Recherches sur le langage,” in *Faux Pas*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, p. 108.

Chapter Two

Anonymity and Doubt: Reading the *Papiers Collés* with Mallarmé

Le moi est haïssable
—Pascal, *Pensées*

If I say, “I am Meyer Schapiro,” I am talking about myself. If I say, “I am a pronoun,” I’m not speaking correct English; I have to say, “*I* is a pronoun.” I am not talking about myself, but about the word for myself. If I say, “*I* is a vertical line,” I am referring to the stroke through which I make the word *I* on a sheet of paper. There are three different senses of the word *I*. In the Cubist painting all three senses exist.
—Meyer Schapiro¹

Given the opportunity to respond to Gertrude Stein’s memoir, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Georges Braque did not dwell on her characterization of him as a mere “grenadier” to Pablo Picasso’s “Napoleon.”² Rather than assert his parity with the Spanish painter, two decades removed from their period of intense collaboration before the First World War, Braque objected to the ensnarement of cubism within the biographical mode itself, inevitably centered as it is on the artist’s personality:

[Stein] has entirely misunderstood cubism, which she sees simply in terms of personalities. In the early days of cubism, Pablo Picasso and I were engaged in what we felt was a search for the anonymous personality. We were inclined to efface our own personalities in order to find originality.³

At the height of the cubist period, between 1911 and 1912, the two artists were “like mountain climbers roped together,” as Braque put it, and their works became virtually indistinguishable (Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2), sharing a vocabulary of objects plucked

¹ Meyer Schapiro, *The Unity of Picasso’s Art*, New York: George Brazillier, 2000, p. 23

² Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 65.

³ Georges Braque, “Testimony Against Gertrude Stein,” *Transition* [Special Issue], February 1935, p. 13-14.

from the bohemian interior and reconstituted according to a grammar of hinged facets floating over a near-monochrome ground.⁴ Abandoning his typical aversion to utopian pronouncements, Braque suggested that this extraordinary stylistic convergence between two painters was the result of a conscious project to dissolve the self-contained artistic subject—and all its ideological baggage, from the very notion of an individual style to the cult of the creative personality. The art of the future, Braque implied, would be made anonymously.

No matter how warranted one's resistance to "being dazzled by old men musing on the days of their youth," as T.J. Clark puts it⁵, it is remarkable that decades after the end of the cubist experiment, there is rare unanimity on this point from the three key figures: Braque, Picasso, and Kahnweiler. In statements recalled by Françoise Gilot, Picasso explained cubism in this way:

It was because we felt the temptation, the hope, of an anonymous art, not in its expression but in its point of departure. We were trying to set up a new order and it had to express itself through different individuals.⁶

Long after the war separated him and Braque, Picasso remembered cubism as a "collective adventure," as "a kind of laboratory research from which every pretension or individual vanity was excluded."⁷ Yet, from the vantage point of mid-century, surveying the dissemination of cubism "through different individuals" as it became a collective period style—indeed, the "modern" style par excellence—Picasso nevertheless felt that the "new order" sought in cubism had been a "failure" because "individualism was

⁴ Cited in John Richardson, *Braque*, Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1961, p. 12.

⁵ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven, 1999, p. 222.

⁶ Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1964, p. 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*

already too strong.” After cubism’s exhaustion, Picasso stated, he sought an “individual adventure” and would follow Van Gogh, the modern archetype of the protean artist individual, for the remainder of his life.⁸

Despite its suggestiveness for an analysis of modernist aesthetic ideology, the stakes of anonymity as a principle for pictorial practice—as a “point of departure” for works of art—would remain unclear were it not for Kahnweiler’s *Juan Gris*.⁹ There, Kahnweiler argued that the art of Picasso and Braque entailed “a deliberate gesture toward *impersonal* authorship, arising out of a conviction that the painter’s ‘hand,’ his individual ‘handwriting,’ should not be visible in the finished product” (JG 124). First symptomized by Picasso and Braque’s decision to stop signing their paintings—for “what is more ‘personal’ than a signature?”—, Kahnweiler stated that the impersonality of cubism reached its peak in the series of newspaper collages made by Picasso and Braque in 1912, known as the *papiers collés*, which “replac[ed] the ‘hand-painted’ surface by the ‘ready-made’” (JG 124). Although convinced that “anything worth-while in the evolution of the plastic arts since 1920 had its origin... in the work of the cubists,” that “Dada contributed nothing: it was entirely nihilistic and destroyed its own creators,” and that “Marcel Duchamp’s [post-cubist work was a] waste of his considerable gifts,” Kahnweiler’s very use of the term “ready-made” (“*tout fait*” in the French) spoke to his awareness of the expanded art historical terrain opened by cubist “impersonality” (JG 137).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁹ Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Mes galeries et mes peintres: Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, pp. 180-81.

However, in the voluminous literature on cubism, and on the *papiers collés* in particular, the question of the anonymous impulse has received scant analysis. A first exception is William Rubin's interpretation of "depersonalization" as a form of imagined solidarity on the part of the cubists with the manual labour of the working class.¹⁰ For Rubin, further, anonymity was the operative principle of a proto-Constructivist desire to democratize art production, epitomized by Picasso's remark about the *Guitar* construction of 1912: "You'll see, I'm going to hold on to *el guitarron*, but I'll sell the blueprint [*el plan*]; then everybody will be able to make one."¹¹ Another major exception is T.J. Clark's essay "Cubism and Collectivity," a landmark study that set cubism's desire to craft an impersonal and anonymous pictorial language into the register of the "as if." For Clark, Braque and Picasso painted *as if* they had utterly dismantled the "established mechanics of Western illusionism" and had instantiated a "hypothetically complete and alternative system of representation."¹² The fact that such a practice remained hypothesis, that it failed the "test of collectivity" and, in truth, existed only as the private language of two painters, implied no "demotion" to Clark, but an indication that modernism always slipped below the threshold of the objectivity that it most desperately sought.

That this dissolution of subjectivity into an impartial technical analysis was an exemplary modernist myth, that no "unitary mode of notation" could exist as such, should be clear from the argument presented in Chapter One about Picasso's works from Cadaqués, in which the quest for a pure mode of perception gave itself over to the staging

¹⁰ William Rubin, "Picasso and Braque: An Introduction," in *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989, pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Rubin cites Picasso's 'quip' from André Salmon's memoirs: André Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin, volume II*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, p. 82.

¹² Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* p. 213.

of representation as blankness or silence. This chapter, however, follows Kahnweiler's suggestion in rooting the "anonymous" within the newspaper collages, or *papiers collés*, began by Picasso and Braque in 1912. In doing so, it will trace cubism's search for a "pure" form of visual "notation" as it turns itself inside out: in the *papiers collés*, the standardizing impulse that guided the progressive reduction and restriction of chroma, shape, and shade reconstituted these pictorial elements into their industrial equivalents. The impersonal and the anonymous, this chapter will argue, were the terms marshaled to sublimate, in a single dialectical move, the antithesis between the *autonomy* of Cubism's hermetic pictorial language and the social *heteronomy* within which its refined representational games took place. The *papiers collés*, in this view, represent less the renunciation of a previously held purism in a sudden act of letting the world in—as the now-dominant narrative goes—than the paradoxical discovery that the impersonal and anonymous could be found "ready-made" in the industrial production of communication being mastered by an ascendant capitalist press.

The present chapter, further, will argue that the "anonymous" in cubism is not limited to the fact of Picasso and Braque's close collaboration, their suppression of the signature, or their valorization of "the studio as a place of manual labour"; nor can it be recuperated as a theme or subject in their art by collapsing the impersonal into the cubist critique of physiognomic likeness, for example.¹³ At the risk of overshadowing Braque's contribution to the development of collage, I will focus primarily on Picasso's early newspaper collages, following Kahnweiler's suggestion that the tendency toward depersonalization found its most potent expression in the cubist incorporation of

¹³ On cubism's critique of portraiture, see Benjamin Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture," in *Formalism and Historicity: Models and methods in Twentieth-Century Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015, pp. 471-508.

newspaper text into the work of art (a material more central to Picasso's *papiers collés* than to Braque's). I argue that the paradigm of anonymity can most productively be conceived as a means to address three interrelated problems: first, the fraught question of what, how, or whether the viewer is to read in the *papiers collés*; second, the nature of Picasso's mode of selection and, by proxy, the reach of artistic intention in the newspapers; third, the conjunction of "purity" with the heteronomy of capitalist production. On this last point I will investigate the problem of color in cubism which preceded the invention of the *papiers collés*. This section will allow a discussion of Braque's impersonality and a broader reflection on cubism's relation to reification. I will end with an analysis of the link between the abstraction of the *papiers collés* and their most manifest social content, which is to say, the status of journalistic language in early-twentieth-century France.

Each of these questions, I argue, can be addressed by tracing the genealogy of the cubist anonymous aesthetic back to the poetic theory and practice formulated by Mallarmé in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Mallarmé, indeed, contrasted what he believed to be his modest achievements as a poet with his unrealized goal to produce a form of writing "which, I think, will be anonymous—the Text there speaking on its own, without the voice of an author" (D 4). Mallarmé contended, further, that the work's negation of the person of the author would entail also a withdrawal from the reader: "Impersonified, the volume, to the extent that one separates from it as author, does not demand a reader, either. As such, please note, among human accessories it takes place all by itself: made, being" (D 219). Mallarmé proposed, thus, that the depersonalization of the author was the price to pay for the achievement of a form of

transindividual and multivalent communication, set against the everyday use of language. This chapter will discuss Mallarmé's development of a conception of language as an impersonal zone of chance and negativity, informed by his reading of Hegel as he was planning a dissertation on linguistics, and develop his nuanced vision of poetic language as a critique of the socially enforced instrumentalization of language. The paradox at the heart of this essay is the fact that Picasso, fourteen years after Mallarmé's death, sought such an "anonymous art... express[ing] itself through different individuals" in the pages of the daily news.¹⁴

Reading the Paper

Une personnalité n'est qu'une erreur persistante.
—Max Jacob, *Art Poétique*, 1922¹⁵

The Metropolitan Museum's *Man with a Hat and Violin*, 1912, (Figure 2.3) is the largest of the first group of closely related newspaper *papiers collés* that Picasso began in his studio in Montparnasse in winter 1912. In this series Picasso constrained his

¹⁴ On this topic, the present essay departs from the important work on Mallarmé and the *papiers collés* by Christine Poggi, who argues that Picasso's use of newspaper stood as "a self-conscious negation of Symbolist values." In the course of her sophisticated analysis of the consequences of material heterogeneity in the *papiers collés*, Poggi unfortunately conflates Mallarmé's work with the "ivory tower purist attitudes of the Symbolists," defined by an "aspiration to create an autonomous art free of all reality" and a reactionary disdain for the popular associations of the newspaper. Against this reading of Mallarmé, which has been influential in American art history, I argue that the dialectical nature of the poet's critique of instrumental language should form the basis of a historical account of the aesthetics of anonymity in Picasso's collages. See Poggi, "Mallarmé, Picasso, and the Newspaper as Commodity," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 1:1, Fall 1987, 133–151. In this, my argument concurs with the recent scholarship of Linda Goddard, who has importantly argued, against Poggi, that Mallarmé's multifaceted engagement with the popular culture of his day evinces a complex resonance with Picasso's collages, rather than a mere opposition. See Linda Goddard, "Mallarmé, Picasso and the Aesthetic of the Newspaper," in *Aesthetic Rivalries: Word and Image in France, 1880-1926*, Oxford, 2012, 163–196. For the best account of Mallarmé's tactical interest in print culture writ large, see Anna Sigridur Arnar, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book and the Transformation of Print Culture*, Chicago, 2010.

¹⁵ Max Jacob, *Art Poétique*, Paris: L'élocoquent, 1987, pp. 10.

figurative practice to minor variations on a generalized facial structure, stripped of individual identity, of the sort forged in Cadaqués. With the sensuous plenitude of chiaroscuro all but abolished, and line reduced to a diagrammatic framework, Picasso ended up with a toolkit of basic forms, the elasticity of which he exploited to the degree that they seem to compass the entirety of visual experience. The face, in other words, is made up of the same visual material as the violin: the double-curve of the ears echoes the man's profile and the right side of the violin, just as the interrupted polygon that marks the transition from the forehead to the nose repeats structurally in the necks of both man and violin.¹⁶

The *papiers collés*, then, reduce the visible world to modular pictorial units held together by a basic linear principle of connectivity. Yet to this visual scaffolding, which he tended to lay down first in charcoal,¹⁷ Picasso added various fragments of newspaper that seem to signal the return of referentiality after its displacement in cubism's progressive development toward abstraction. This is to say, after rigorously fragmenting and schematizing the depicted object to the point of severing ties with the "natural standpoint" presumed by everyday perception, Picasso chose to add to his works the very figure of direct and immediate communication: the newspaper.¹⁸

¹⁶ This description is indebted to the work of Yve-Alain Bois on the *papiers collés*, which he interpreted in relation to Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of semiotic value. See Chapter One, and Yve-Alain Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, New York, 1992, pp. 169-195.

¹⁷ This is demonstrated by the technical analyses published in Anne Umland and Blair Hartzell, *Picasso: The Making of Cubism, 1912–1914*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015, 7.9

¹⁸ The term 'natural standpoint' is drawn from Edmund Husserl, and refers, in brief, to the attitude of everyday perception which transcendental phenomenology seeks to 'bracket.' For Husserl, the 'natural thesis' presumes the existence of 'the world of facts and affairs... a *world of values*, a *world of goods*, a *practical world*,' viz. the world as given to the subject in everyday instrumental existence. The relationship of cubism to both Husserl's phenomenology and to Cézanne is treated in depth in the first chapter of my dissertation, 'Total Expansion of the Letter: Cubism, Dada, Mallarmé' (Harvard University, 2016).

And yet, by introducing a cacophony of newsprint language—from isolated letters to entire columns—cut from their contexts as from their initial authors, Picasso’s papers cast into doubt basic readerly questions, such as “Who is speaking?” and “Who is being addressed?”¹⁹ If the sheer profusion of authors and sources bars the reader from fully rooting the words in Picasso’s own convictions or thoughts, their “ready-made” nature, as Kahnweiler put it, causes one, further, to question whether they fulfill language’s communicative function at all, which is to say, whether they contain information intentionally transmitted from an author to a recipient capable of interpreting it.

Nevertheless, generations of scholarship on cubism attest to the presence, and the near-irresistible draw, of textual moments in the *papiers collés* that seem to resonate with the voice and the life of Picasso himself. For example, the body of the violin with the two frontal f-holes in *Man with a Hat and Violin* is made up of an article concerning a certain “Mlle Léonie” (Figure 2.4) It is hard to imagine Picasso reading this article, as he cut it from *Le Journal*, without entertaining the memory of a character named “Léonie” from Jacob’s *Saint Matorel*, or at least of his own etchings of that character illustrating the book.²⁰ If this reading seems implausibly dependent on the particular biography of its maker, one might instead pause on the allusive headline “*La Cambriole*,” adjacent to the man’s mouth, and read it as a canny commentary on the procedure enacted by the work—in this case, theft (Figure 2.5).

Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, Volume I*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson, New York, 2012, 53

¹⁹ The question “who is speaking?” propelled Rosalind Krauss’ deconstructive analysis of the nature of signification in the *papiers collés*. See Rosalind Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, New York, 1998, 74.

²⁰ See the discussion of these prints in Chapter One.

A familiar question in the literature on cubism immediately presents itself: at what order of textual magnitude do such readings cease to function? At one extreme, the strong referentialist position exemplified by Patricia Leighton insisted that the articles included in a collage should be read in full, with their sociopolitical content transferred onto the person of Picasso, who is presumed to have underwritten their semanticity through his very act of selection.²¹ Countering the biographical univocality and the naturalistic logic tacit in such reading, a more skeptical position, advanced by Leo Steinberg, Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, suggested that headlines, as carriers of greatest linguistic impact, could be meaningfully if ambiguously read, while the remaining newspaper text fluctuated between iconic, linguistic, and structural signification.²² To take the most contentious example, if one doubts that the articles about the Balkan Wars that populate *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, 1912 (figure 2.6) amount to a political *prise de position* by Picasso himself, one may be willing, conversely, to read the headline “*La dislocation*” as a kind of label for the formal procedure enacted in the fractured glass drawn next to it.²³

But allowing one’s attention to pass from the article to the phrase to the word to the fragment, the viewer would then seem invited to analyze the text at a granular level: What about, for example, the fact that the edge of the dislocated glass reaches out onto the adjacent sheet to precisely underline the word “*Jour*,” calling to mind the absent name of the newspaper from which the clippings were taken, *Le Journal*? And what about,

²¹ Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 121–142. For a more polemical version of her argument, see Leighton ‘Cubist Anachronisms: Ahistoricity, Cryptoformalism, and Business-as-Usual in New York’ *Oxford Art Journal* 17: 2, 1994: pp. 91-102.

²² In the symposium discussion following a paper by David Cottington, Steinberg noted, “My suspicion is that the blocks of type are not to be read; they provide a kind of texture, a kind of precise energy within the field.” Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, p. 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

further, the fact that the black zig-zag cutout near the bottom of the collage partially obscures a headline reading “*Les journaux Turcs annoncent une grande victoire*” to precisely isolate the same word: “*jour*”? If something happens once, one may be likely to dismiss it as coincidence; if it happens twice, this very repetition leads one to presume the existence of a guiding hand.²⁴

In the search for intention, however, there seems to be no standard of proof, let alone a court of final appeal, to distinguish happenstance from design. If most interpreters of one of Picasso’s first and most famous *papiers collés*, *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass*, 1912 (Figure 1.17), have been comfortable reading “*La Bataille s’est engagée*” as a declaration of aesthetic brinkmanship with Braque, the word “*Cortège*” (“procession”) in the bottom left corner, partially cut off by the edge of the page, has been passed over without comment. This is perhaps surprising given that the word “*Cortège*” reappears in a headline from the Centre Pompidou’s *Violin*, 1912 (Figure 2.7), made during the following weeks, and, most importantly, that the word is the title of a poem from Paul Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes* that Picasso evidently thought enough of to copy out in his sketchbook six years prior, during the summer of 1905.²⁵ The word’s repeated appearance, in close proximity to wine glasses, guitars and violins, must have pointed indelibly to Picasso’s social world, the café culture in which, with dependable regularity, “Max [Jacob] would begin to read Verlaine, slowly and softly at first, suddenly he would get agitated, start gesticulating, wildly turning the pages of the book.”²⁶ Could the words

²⁴ In fact, both fragments reading “*Jour*” are taken from the front page of the November 18th, 1912, issue of *Le Journal*, a fact which will take on significance in my argument.

²⁵ Brigitte Léal, *Carnets: Catalogue des dessins, v. 1*, Paris : Réunion des musées nationaux, c1996, p. 88.

²⁶ Jaime Sabartés, *Picasso, An Intimate Portrait*, New York: Prentice Hall 1946, p. 72.

“*Cortège*,” isolated as they are by Picasso’s scissors in two collages, picture just such a page by Verlaine laying on the café table, waiting for Max to pluck it up?

In the face of such “discoveries,” however, the “hope of an anonymous art” seems to be left far behind, as we settle into a more comfortable univocality, in which Picasso’s voice cuts clearly through the clamor if we are only sensitive enough to listen for him. And inevitably, when we do listen, Picasso tends to speak of his life, of his art, of his friends, of the poets or the cabaret. To justify our own selection of certain words as glittering gems of intention, we implicitly imagine Picasso flipping through the newspaper and being struck by—or even searching for—these same words and, in a moment of creative plenitude, presenting them in the work for us to discover. In the absence of any guarantee of semanticity, the viewer/reader is left to make more or less reasonable distinctions between words that possess meaning (perhaps bolstered by our sense of a certain pun’s inevitability, or by a shred of evidence, however flimsy, such as Picasso’s copy of “*Cortège*”), and words that do not.

I will argue, on the one hand, that reading the papers for Picasso entails a certain degree of wish fulfillment; and, on the other hand, that the feeling of doubt about the newspapers’ meaningfulness is in itself one of the most profound aesthetic experiences staged by the *papiers collés*. In order to account for the readymade status of the language in the *papiers collés*, one must take seriously the fact that the words were not written by Picasso, but by unnamed others whose identities and intentions have been sheared away along with their contexts by the very process of cutting and pasting.

Given the semantic (and historiographical) weight resting upon our assumptions about Picasso’s choice of papers, the existence of a principle of selection, or lack thereof,

in the *papiers collés* has attracted relatively little speculation. What, then, guided Picasso's scissors? What differentiated, in his mind, a fragment worth including, from one to be cast aside? It is to this lacuna that I now turn in order to advance a theory about Picasso's "impersonal form of execution" within the pages of *Le Journal*.

In *Man with a Violin and Hat* (Figure 2.3), Picasso made thrifty use of a single newspaper sheet, the front page of *Le Journal* from December 3rd, 1912, with a strategic cut producing the double-curve carving out the man's torso in negative space, and the polysemic shape in the lower left corner that echoes the man's profile, ears, and the rather guitar-like contour of the violin. Further, the long strip running down the right side of the collage is taken from the verso of this same front page, sharing an edge with the bottom of the torso piece. This reversal is of a kind with the one that Krauss analyzed in *Violin*, in which the relationship of recto to verso in the two adjacent fragments is made evident to visual intuition through the interlocking patterns of the cut, presenting less an illusion of rotation into depth than its literalization, as Picasso cut the sheet in two, flipped one half, and pasted both flat on the paper support.²⁷

However, the link between the two collages runs deeper than formal analogy: the two works are both physically made up of the same sheet of paper, the front page of *Le Journal* from December 3rd (Figure 2.8). The atmospheric sheet with the tantalizingly self-referential headline "*Une Nouvelle Ordonnance pour Faciliter La Circulation*" is from the verso and its counterpart forming the body of the violin is from the recto: a single cut links the two sheets, which read as figure and ground, opacity and

²⁷ Rosalind Krauss first made this observation in her groundbreaking critique of the biographical mode of interpretation, "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 23-40.

transparency, and another cut along their top edge links them to the hip section of the Metropolitan Museum's large collage.

Picasso's playful economization of the newspaper surface, however, extends even further. The newspaper cutout from *Bottle and Wine Glass on a Table*, 1912 (Figure 2.9), mentioning "anti-militarism," is also taken from this same sheet's verso and stood on its side. So far, this leaves one major area of the newspaper page unaccounted for, a space featuring the words "*Exigences et illusions*"—enough to send the average Picasso scholar into an exegetical frenzy. This section, as though inevitably, found its way into a little-known collage from 1912, *Bottle and Guitar on a Table*, 1912, (Figure 2.10). If one presumes that the notched shapes of the two cut outs near the top of the page preserved the words *Le Journal* for use in another collage, then the entire sheet was used with very little remainder (Figure 2.11). These newspaper collages, and all the textual information that they contain, then, begin to seem less the result of Picasso's careful "choice" than of his restricted action portioning out an indifferent field.

Indeed, Picasso's use of the sheet as an a priori constraint casts doubt on the assumption that the mere appearance of a newspaper cutout implies an act of intentional selection by the artist that then authorizes a second act of selection by the reader, who chooses which words speak and which remain mute. In the case of this important group of collages, this supposition would lead inexorably to the mythical notion that the entire front page of *Le Journal* from December 3rd, 1912, was infused with allusive meaning through the force of Picasso's artistic will—recto and verso. Indeed, this way of using a newspaper sheet in its near-entirety was not an exception, but seems to have been the

norm for the first group of *papiers collés* made in winter 1912, with the next page of this very same issue of *Le Journal* producing five additional works, for example.²⁸

The point is not that we should cease to think of Picasso's friend Max when we read "Mlle Léonie," of the artist's politics when we read "anti-militarism," or of his procedures when we read "*exigences et illusions*." Instead, I make two proposals: first, that we hold on to our experience of doubt about whether such meanings are mere accidents of chance; and, second, that this doubt is not extrinsic to the significance of the *papiers collés*, something to be overcome through analysis, but a central part of their playful richness. In the *papiers collés*, interpretation itself becomes a perilous wager in which the role of chance can never be abolished, in which "Every thought emits a throw of the dice" [*Toute pensée émet un coup de dés*"], as Mallarmé put it in the famous maxim at the end of *Un Coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard*.²⁹

As if to echo Mallarmé's claim for the inextricability of chance from each act of human meaning-making, in *Table with Bottle, Wineglass, and Newspaper*, 1912 (Figure 2.12), Picasso pasted the headline "*Un Coup de Théâtre*" from *Le Journal*, shorn of its last four letters: "*Un Coup de Thé*." And, as Krauss and Linda Goddard have both noted, Picasso made a second *papier collé* with suggestively Mallarméan language: in *Bottle, Cup and Newspaper*, 1912 (Figure 2.13), the collage element reading "[L]ITRE D'OR" plays on the poet's favoured polysemic word, which appears regularly in his poems to ambiguously signify "gold," the conjunction "whereas," or its dispersal into *sonore* (or

²⁸ Space constraints prevent a further demonstration for these works, but this can be easily confirmed by comparing pages three and four of December 3rd's issue of *Le Journal* with DR cats. 534, 539, 546, 555, and 568.

²⁹ The poem was first released in the journal *Cosmopolis* in 1897, and would published in its definitive book version only posthumously with the 1914 edition printed by the *Nouvelle revue Française*.

son or), *hors*, *dehors*, etc.³⁰ However, almost as though to cast doubt upon these irresistible references—as though to interrupt the desire to read them referentially at all—analyzing the two bottles together, the viewer may notice that they are two halves of a single, once-continuous strip of newspaper that ran along the top of the same front page on December 4th, 1912. Cut through the *U* of *Le Journal*, the contiguity of the two sheets highlights their uncertain semantic status, rendering their twin front-page Mallarméisms a most improbable result to expect of any throw of the dice.

Mallarmé: Anonymity, Purity and The Science of Language

I amused myself with smothering known history beneath the annals of anonymity.
—Paul Valéry, *La soirée avec Monsieur Teste*, 1896³¹

Personal poetry has had its days of relative jugglery and contingent contortions.
Let us take up the indestructible thread of impersonal poetry...
—Isidore Ducasse, *Poésies*, 1870

In “Crisis of verse,” Mallarmé summed up the anonymous aesthetic with epochal clarity: “The pure work implies the elocutory disappearance of the poet, who cedes the initiative to words, through the clash of their mobilized inequalities” (D 208). In this passage, Mallarmé condensed a number of his life-long preoccupations in a series of interconnected enigmas: the search for a “pure” form of expression; the implied singularity of this goal, as if there could only be one “pure work” in the end; the

³⁰ For Goddard, the ‘ludic exploration of mass-cultural materials’ evinced by these two collages suggest an interpretation of ‘Picasso’s arrangement of words as a declaration that he is playing a “game” [“*Jou*”] with the barriers that separated the “gold” [“*Or*”] of Mallarmé’s poetry from the detritus of “newspaper.”’ Goddard, *Aesthetic Rivalries*, 170. Another collage, *Bouteille et verre* (Daix 543) deploys an upside down fragment from the December 2nd issue reading ‘Lampe O.R.’ a fact that Krauss analyses in Rosalind Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, pp. 70, 78. See also Jacques Derrida’s discussion of Mallarmé’s tendency to repeat words and sounds (of which ‘Or’ is just one example) in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. trans Barbara Johnson, Chicago, 1981, 262–3.

³¹ Paul Valéry, *La soirée avec Monsieur Teste*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1946, p. 17

consequent disappearance of the author, whose “death” would be “elocutory,” which is to say that it would take place in language; and finally, the hope that this language, these words, would thereby—relieved of their duty to the person of the author—attain a “mobility” deriving from their innate instability. It is the force of the impersonal or anonymous that linked this collection of propositions for Mallarmé, functioning as a principle of radical epistemological uncertainty at the heart of language.

Mallarmé expanded upon this stringent model in “Restricted Action” (1895) by presenting his theses on literary anonymity in the allegorical form of advice to a young writer. The essay begins with this novice asking the elder poet for guidance in “the occupation of creating or succeeding with words,” and attempting to impress Mallarmé with a romantic vision of writing as a form of intellectual action, requiring the author “to unclench one’s fists, to break out of a sedentary dream, [to engage in] violent fisticuffs with the idea, like a need for exercise” (D 216). Responding to this “Comrade, this other, ... confid[ing] his need to act,” Mallarmé patiently cast into doubt, on the one hand, the possibility of “action” in writing, and, on the other, the desire to affirm one’s existence through words:

To act, otherwise and for someone for whom exercise begins with smoking, signified, visitor, I understand you, philosophically, to produce with many a movement that gives you the impression that you were its source, and therefore exist: something of which no one can *a priori* be certain (D 216).

If the young writer nevertheless decided to pursue his dream of writing as self-expression, two paths opened, which Mallarmé named “plenitude” and “haste”: either, to aim one’s creative work “by an act of will, unbeknownst to others, lasting a lifetime, toward a multiple radiance – thought itself,” or to work within “the outlets currently

within reach, newspapers and their vortex, to conduct a force in any direction whatsoever, thwarted, but with the immunity of a draw” (D 215).

While it may initially seem that Mallarmé is recommending the former, the direct expression thought in its plenitude, and opposing the latter, the hasty plunge into the newspaper vortex, he went on to suggest that both were means of escaping writing: the first involved an idealist attempt to skip over the materiality of the word and attain the unmediated presentation of thought, and the second capitulated to the journalistic model of totally instrumentalized communication. Mallarmé, conversely, insisted that his young visitor pay attention to the materiality of the word (an injunction passed on to the reader of the prose piece through the text’s typographical idiosyncrasies):

Your act is always applied to paper; for meditating without a trace is evanescent, nor is the exalting of an instinct in some vehement, lost gesture what you were seeking.

Écrire—

... One doesn’t write, luminously, on a dark field; the alphabet of stars alone does that, sketched or interrupted; man writes black upon white (D 216).

Far from offering reassurance to the young writer, Mallarmé proposed that after “circumscribing his domain of effort” to the physical “conditions” of writing, the writer is left with opaque markings, black on white, that are extremely inhospitable to the self and that rebuff any vain desire for action: “The right to accomplish anything exceptional or free of vulgar actions,” he warned, “is paid for by the omission of the writer and his death as a so-and-so, so to speak” (D 216).

If Mallarmé only became a key term in Kahnweiler’s genealogy of Cubism in his work of the 1940s, his close friend Carl Einstein was aware, as early as 1913, of the relationship between negation and writing at the heart of Mallarmé’s work. In the

November 1913 issue of *Die weißen blätter*, the newspaper that would publish Kahnweiler's "*Der Kubismus*" only three years later, Einstein published a short text "On Paul Claudel," in which he argued for a connection between "today's art" and "certain of our poets."³² Comparing Picasso to "the immoralist Gide," Einstein wrote, "Picasso unveils the spiritual parts through which we physically [*körperlich*] perceive and give form; Gide places objects in your hands, the sensation of which is the poem."³³ Einstein continued,

The ancestor of this poet is Mallarmé, the tireless seeker of a distinguished Absolute, of a narrow dream; he believed that poetry should never cross into a zone of randomness [*die Zone des Regellosen*], it required an uncommon detachment, distance. He taught: the object [*Gegenstand*] of poetry is not the object [*Objekt*], but the purely linguistic impression of the dream, of the imaginary. His was the poem of the mystery of an absolute language, whose formula had been established by the German Hegel: 'An outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence.'³⁴ Mallarmé investigated the difficult point, where language can justify itself only through being-fixed [*Fixiertsein*], through the contrast of the written black

³² Carl Einstein, "Über Paul Claudel," *Die Weißen Blätter*, N. 3 (November 1913): 289. *Die Weißen Blätter* was a newspaper founded in Leipzig by Eric-Ernst Schwabach, and published during the War in Zurich by René Schickele from 1915 onward, advancing a pacifist position. It published Kahnweiler's "Der Kubismus" in September 1916, and Hugo Ball's "*Totenrede für Hans Leybold*" in April 1915. See Chapter Three.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

³⁴ "Ein Dasein, das unmittelbar selbstbewußte Exi[s]tenz ist." *Ibid.*, p. 290. The passage by Hegel referred to by Einstein is from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in the discussion of the "Abstract Work of Art." There, Hegel writes, "The work of art therefore demands another element of its existence, the god another mode of coming forth than this, in which, out of the depths of his creative night, he descends into the opposite, into externality, into the determination of the Thing which lacks self-consciousness. This higher element is Language—an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence. Just as the *individual* self-consciousness is *immediately* present in language, so it is also immediately present as a *universal* infection; the complete separation into independent selves is at the same time the fluidity and the universally communicated unity of the many selves; language is the soul existing as soul." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. AV Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 430. Hegel's use of the term "abstract" may mislead contemporary readers, for he means precisely the opposite of what we consider "abstraction" in art: "abstract art" for Hegel is art that has attained the idealization of human form, which is a process of "abstraction" from natural reality. As Jon Stewart puts it, "By 'abstract art' Hegel means the idealized human forms that we find in Greek sculpture. These forms are abstract since one must abstract from the actual natural forms and their imperfections in order to arrive at them." Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit": A Systematic Interpretation*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000, p. 410

and the bare white of the page. (I refer to his unpublished *Coup de Dés* [sic].)³⁵

Beyond providing further proof of the status of *Un Coup de Dés* among the European avant-gardes prior to its definitive publication in 1914 or of Einstein's knowledge of "Restricted Action," (in his paraphrase of Mallarmé's "man writes black on white"), this text demonstrates Einstein's understanding of the relationship between Mallarmé's theory of language and his metaphysical experience of the Void, or *Néant*—and its resonance with Hegel, which will be discussed below.

Describing the poet as a "fanatic of the Absolute," Einstein continued, "Mallarmé was in some sense orthodox. Only his devotion to the indifferent *Néant* counted; he was orthodox, since his belief had no object [*Objekt*]."³⁶ Although the text succumbs to the myth of Mallarmé as an ascetic monk of the Absolute, Einstein precisely described the dialectic of transposition and structure for Mallarmé, his conviction that the destruction of the signified object implied the becoming-object of language itself. Einstein's use of the word "dream" is quixotic, seemingly to imply a non-logical or at least non-instrumental relationship between signs: "Mallarmé taught: language is the whole of the poem; it carries the dream, the specific in language must be interpretable. The dream is the classification of images (imagination) which arise apart, not according to logical conditions, but according to sound-relationships [*Tonverwandtschaft*], that old power."³⁷

The dialectical and negativizing capacities of language were explored by Mallarmé between 1869 and 1870, bracketed in personal history by his existential "crise

³⁵ Einstein, "Über Paul Claudel," p. 290.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290-291.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

de Tournon” and in political history by the Paris Commune. In these years, Mallarmé undertook a study of linguistics while living in Avignon, seeking to produce a dissertation and gain his *license ès lettres*. He immersed himself, with the fervor of the autodidact, in a wide range of texts, notably Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, Véra’s translations of Hegel’s *Encyclopédie*³⁸, Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Lessons in Elementary Physiology* (about which Mallarmé notes, “A scientific book cannot be too simple for me, who would easily locate the larynx in the brain”³⁹), and Michel Bréal’s translation and commentary on the comparative grammar of Franz Bopp.⁴⁰ Each of these texts, intellectually and historically far flung, encompassing philosophy, evolutionary science, and linguistics, formed a component of Mallarmé’s attempt to systematize a formal theory of language.

As evinced by his correspondence with Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Henri Lefébure and Henri Cazalis, this appears to have been a period of intense intellectual labor for Mallarmé, and one ultimately marked by dissatisfaction and failure. Mallarmé conceived his thesis on “the Science of Language” as the “parallel labor” to the ambitious prose poem *cum* philosophical tale *Igitur*, with the former establishing the latter’s “scientific

³⁸ The question of Mallarmé’s knowledge of Hegel is highly contested. For now, I will simply note that as early as September 1866, Villiers writes Mallarmé and says, “As for Hegel, I’m very happy that you have directed your attention toward this miraculous genius, this unequalled procreator, who rebuilt the universe on his own terms” Mallarmé *Correspondance*, p. 342. Later, in Mallarmé’s *Conférence sur Villiers de l’Isle-Adam*, he noted Villiers’ fondness for “the Titan of the Human Spirit, Hegel, by whom that extraordinary reader seemed to be recommended... He had read a considerable amount, both once and for all and in the course of years to come, notably anything having to do with Man’s eventual grandeur, whether in history or in himself, or in the doubt about any realization...” (D 57).

³⁹ Cited in Mondor, p. 290

⁴⁰ See the note on Bopp, Saussure, and Foucault in Chapter One. While Mallarmé read Bréal on Bopp, it is not clear how well acquainted the poet was with Bréal’s later work on polysemy or on value and difference in signification. Valéry would review Bréal’s *Sémantique* for the *Mercur de France* in January 1898, at the height of his friendship with Mallarmé. Richard Cándida Smith notes that Mallarmé was “more likely to know the work of Saussure’s mentor Michel Bréal.” Smith, *Mallarmé’s Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 31.

foundation” (OC I 1360). However, he abandoned the thesis and the poem alike by around 1870, leaving only a series of enigmatic sketches and scattered notes.⁴¹ These “Notes sur le Langage,” as they have come to be known, were published in 1929 by Bonniot and included in the *Oeuvres* by Henri Mondor in 1945, yet they remain marginal, despite their great historical and philosophical interest.

Oriented less toward the acquisition of knowledge to pass doctoral exams and produce a *thèse d’agrégation*—the nominal goal—Mallarmé’s notes reflected on the uneasy conjunction embodied by the very term “Science of Language.” One note, acting as something like a motto, claimed to present the “Results of the acquaintance of the Idea of Science and the Idea of Language,” (OCI 503) and proceeds quickly to a chiasmus: “Science, having in Language found a confirmation of itself, must now become a *confirmation* of Language” (OCI 507). That is, science, having used language as a mere *means* of access to and description of the empirical world, must now turn its gaze upon itself and “derive an epoch of the reflection of language” (OCI 509).

In brief, for Mallarmé, the study of language via the scientific method proceeded in three steps: first, language, “turned upon itself,” perceives that it is double. It is made up, on the one hand, of what seem to be “momentary acts of the spirit,” which is to say, the substance of any given utterance within a synchronic “language-state,”⁴² and, on the other, the diachronic status of language, its temporal development and change through history (OCI 507). Second, likely borrowing terminologically from Huxley’s

⁴¹ Mallarmé’s son-in-law Dr. Edmond Bonniot published the unfinished poem as *Igitur, ou la Folie d’Elbehnnon* in 1925, arranging the manuscript into the semblance of a completed whole. The importance of *Igitur* will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁴² This is a Saussurean term that refers to the synchronic system of relations within a given language considered as a static totality. See Saussure, *Course*, pp. 81-83.

evolutionary physiology, Mallarmé argued that the human use of language through time constituted a “historical physiology” (OCI 507). Tracing the shifting assemblages between spirit and matter (the two terms mediated by language), the “scientist” or historical physiologist would be able to reconstruct an almost anthropomorphic view of history, an image of humanity as it evolved through its medium of self-expression, Language. And, third, through this “historical physiology,” one could obtain an account of Spirit itself, or “how our world can attach itself to the Absolute” (OCI 508). Therefore, the task that Mallarmé sets to himself is “Within ‘Language’ to explain Language, in its game with respect to Spirit, to *demonstrate it*, without deriving any absolute conclusions (for the Spirit.” [sic] (OCI 505).

Further, Mallarmé’s notes insisted on the distinctness of Language (*Langage*), speech (*parole*), writing (*écriture*), and the Word (*le Verbe*), emphasizing in particular that one should “never confuse Language with the *Verbe*” (OCI 505).⁴³ In Mallarmé’s usage, *Langage* breaks down into its spoken (*parole*) and its written (*écriture*) components. *Parole* establishes a system of sounds (like Einstein’s “sound-relationships”) parallel to the system of things (which is to say, physical reality as it is

⁴³ First a word must be said about Mallarmé’s terminological decision to use *Verbe* and *parole* instead of the more common term “mot” for the word. *Verbe* is derived from the Latin *Verbum* (which etymologically combines *vox* and *res*, the means of expression and the thing expressed) and retains in French two meanings of “part of speech” and “Word of God” (*Logos*), whereas *parole* comes from the Greek *parabolê* (comparison or allegory), and from the Low Latin came to supplant *verbe* for the task of meaning “word,” with *verbe* reserved for the religious connotations. In Barbara Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, the distinction is explained in this way, “Compared to the Latin *Verbum*, which has three meanings, the meaning of *verbe* in French is more restricted. Firmin le Ver’s first Latin-French dictionary ... thus contains three entries for *verbum*: (1) a conversation among several people, (2) the son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and (3) a part of speech that has tense and mood. The last two meanings of *verbe* are attested in French from the twelfth century as a part of speech, *tel fist personel del verbe impersonal*, and as the word of God, *Deu verbe*, which will become *le Verbe* (the Word), the second person of the trinity, God incarnate, from the sixteenth century.” By the end of the 17th century, *mot* was used as the “unit of language” whereas *parole* was “a unit of speech.” Barbara Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 1254-1255.

intuited by the subject): “by creating analogies between things through sound analogies” (OCI 506). *Écriture* received an even more convoluted definition:

Writing, in recording the movement of the Idea manifested by speech, and offering to them their own reflection, in order to perfect them, in the present (via reading), and to conserve them for the future as the annals of the successive effort of speech and its filiation (OCI 506).

Writing, in other words, traces the movement of the Idea as it manifests itself spontaneously in speech (*parole*). It codifies these movements in order to “perfect” them in the present (to make them legible and repeatable) and to preserve them for the future, making up an *archive* of the successive efforts of human expression, and providing thereby a genealogy of the human Spirit.⁴⁴

Next, Mallarmé proposed that the result of such a study of the relations of *Langage*, *écriture* and *parole* would be to prove that, “the *Verbe* will appear behind its medium of language, rendered to its physics and physiology, like a principle, freed, adequate to Time and to the Idea” (OCI 506). What followed was an extremely knotty, yet extremely important, set of propositions that get to the heart of the distinction between the *Verbe* and *Langage*, and of their relationship to time and the human spirit:

Le Verbe is a principle that develops itself through the negation of all principles, i.e., chance, like the Idea, and finds itself, forming, (like it, Thought aroused by Anachronism) it, *la Parole*, with the help of Time, which permits its scattered elements to find one another and link up following its law aroused by these diversions.

Le Verbe, through the Idea and Time, which are “the negation identical to the essence” of Becoming, becomes *Language*.

⁴⁴ This definition is remarkably similar to Hegel’s in the third volume of the *Encyclopedia*, in which writing completes the process of objectification and systematization that began in the passage from the sound to the word. Jim Vernon sums up Hegel’s view of the origin of writing: “The hallmark of writing, then, is the explicit positing of the presupposed *standardization of signs* within a community, or between communities. Writing is introduced to posit a set of sign between subjects that is nonetheless outside of all subjective peculiarity. In other words, written signs are presumed to be particular to none, and always *of the other*. Given the task it is introduced to perform, the essence of writing lies not in the marks left by carving or ink. ‘Writing’ rather essentially posits *the generally articulated signs of the other presupposed by subjective speech*.” Jim Vernon, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Language*, London: Continuum, 2007, p. 71.

Language is the development of *le Verbe*, its idea, in Being, time, becoming its method: accomplishing this through the phases of the Idea and of Time in Being, which is to say, according to Life and the Spirit (OCI 506).

The *Verbe*, then, is a “principle” of temporal “Becoming” that is objectified in language.

The *Verbe* is the temporal becoming of its “medium,” Language, as it negates itself continually. As Paul de Man clarifies, “Mallarmé calls this developing verbal entity Language (*le Langage*), and he warns that one should ‘never confuse Language with the Word [*Verbe*]’; to confuse them would be to mistake the concrete content of a history with a universal historical consciousness.”⁴⁵ In these extraordinarily dense and serpentine reflections, Mallarmé proposed that the *Verbe* is a force of negation at the heart of all Language, which appears at any moment as a stable and objectified system (manifested in writing and speech). The action of the *Verbe* behind Language is made evident through historical study (“humanity’s search for the Absolute”), which reveals the temporal flux at the heart of language and, thereby, of “Life and the Spirit” (OCI 506).

When one considers the theological connotations of “*Verbe*” in French (in which it is comparable to the *Logos*), we can begin to grasp the extreme radicality of Mallarmé’s assertion that it constituted “‘the negation identical to the essence’ of Becoming,” that it manifested “the negation of all principles, i.e., chance.” It also makes clear the historical role of these reflections on language in Mallarmé’s life: they act as a hinge point between, on the one hand, the metaphysical anguish of the “Crise de Tournon” when Mallarmé disencumbered himself from God and discovered *le Néant*, and, on the other, the mobilization of language that would occupy him for the rest of his life. In these notes, Mallarmé stated, his ultimate goal was to “render to the word, which

⁴⁵ Paul de Man, *Post-Romantic Predicament*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012, p. 88.

can be so viciously stereotyped in us, its mobility,” by demonstrating the *negativity and aleatory flux* at the heart of all language (in the form of the *Verbe*), and, therefore, of the Absolute itself (OCI 510). In his critique of the theology of language, in favor of a form of stringently self-reflexive analysis (“language thinking itself”), Mallarmé discovered neither the divine *Logos* nor the solid and positive ground of the scientific method, but a principle of negativity and contingency (OCI 504). All appearances of ontological stability, all human methods of attaining knowledge, were, for Mallarmé, but a “Fiction”:

All method is a fiction, and good for the demonstration. Language thus appears as the instrument of fiction: it will follow the method of Language. (to be determined) Language thinking itself. In the end, fiction seems to be the very process of the human spirit—it is in fiction that humanity puts into play all method and humanity is reduced to will (OCI 504).

What seems to be suggested in these hermetic sentences is that the application of the scientific method to language, with the goal of producing a theory of language *within language* leads to the vertiginous discovery of a principle that Mallarmé calls Fiction, which underpins (and unravels) language and method alike.

Mallarmé derived at least the terminology for such a negative ontology, if not its philosophical principles, from his study of Hegel.⁴⁶ In the late 1860s, only a few texts by the German philosopher were translated into French, most significantly, the first volume of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the *Logic* translated and

⁴⁶ Richard notes that Mallarmé most likely first encountered Hegel in 1866. Richard, *L’univers imaginaire*, p. 232. He writes, further, “notons pourtant qu’il voulut revivre à ce moment une histoire, qui résume en un sens toutes les histoires, celle du langage, à la fois miroir et instrument actif de toute dialectique temporelle. Sa thèse projetée aurait vérifié dans le domaine de la linguistique les schémas évolutifs découverts chez Hegel.” *Ibid.* p. 193. LJ Austin speculates that Mallarmé would have read an article by E. Scherer entitled “Hegel et l’hégélianisme,” which was published in February 1861 in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. (Cited in *Ibid.*, 232). We know that Mallarmé was a regular reader of this important journal, for example, from his famous letter to Lefébure in 1867, where he writes, “the Modern Poet, *du dernier...* at bottom ‘is a critic above all.’ This is precisely what I’ve observed in myself.” Mallarmé was citing Émile Montégut, “La nouvelle littérature française” from *la Revue des deux mondes* (15 mai 1867), pp. 482-501. Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, pp. 348-9.

commented in French by Augusto Véra in an edition from 1859.⁴⁷ It is most likely that Mallarmé was introduced to Hegel's work through his close friendship with Villiers de l'Isle Adam, an "extraordinary reader" devoted to "the Titan of the Human Spirit, Hegel," as Mallarmé noted in his obituary for Villiers (D 57).⁴⁸ The (pseudo-)philosophical prose of Mallarmé's "Notes sur le Langage" is infused with Hegelianisms, typical of Villiers. As the latter writes in *Clair Lenoir*, a text that Mallarmé knew well, written in 1867, "That which we call Death is merely the middle term, or if you prefer, the necessary negation, required by the Idea in order to develop itself into Spirit, by means of thought."⁴⁹ Indeed, Mallarmé seems to have wholly internalized Villiers' Hegelian theory that "the Idea develops only by encountering itself in its own negation."⁵⁰ In September 1866, Villiers wrote Mallarmé to say, "As for Hegel, I'm very happy that you have directed your attention toward this miraculous genius, this unequalled procreator, who rebuilt the universe on his own terms."⁵¹

While it is clear that the very idea of a "Science of Language," carried Hegelian connotations for Mallarmé, the significance or extent of his understanding of Hegel has been the subject of much debate.⁵² The complexity of the question, which I will not be able to exhaust in this chapter, is indicated by Jean Hyppolite, one of the great post-

⁴⁷ Augusto Véra, *La Logique de Hegel*, trans. A. Véra, Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrange, 1859.

⁴⁸ "...He had read a considerable amount, both once and for all and in the course of years to come, notably anything having to do with Man's eventual grandeur, whether in history or in himself, or in the doubt about any realization—or, on the other side, what is promised by religion: for he was prudent." D 57.

⁴⁹ Villiers de l'Isle Adam, *Claire Lenoire*, Catania : C.U.E.C.M., c1995, p. 135

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵¹ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 342.

⁵² A general summary and historical discussion of the debate can be found in Langan, *Hegel and Mallarmé*, Lanham, MD : University Press of America, c1986.

World-War-II French scholars of Hegel: “Let’s imagine... Hegel’s *Logic* called into question by itself... we should thus have an idea of the Mallarméan effort.”⁵³

The question that we should now ask is: What might Mallarmé have read in Véra’s French translation of Hegel’s *Logic*? In fact, Mallarmé’s very definition of science as the “attainment of consciousness in research on an object, destined to reach the state of the Notion” (OCI 506) mirrored Hegel’s own proposition that logic is “the thinking of thought, or the science of pure thought”⁵⁴ and that “philosophy has no other goal but to transform representations into thought and thought into notions.”⁵⁵ Likewise, for Hegel, the task of thought was to link up the isolated representations of human sensory intuition through its “generalizing” character, which would exist as disconnected and fleeting “atoms” otherwise. Hegel proposed, “It will be demonstrated, in the *Logic*, that thought and the general are identical to one another and their own opposites, that they overcome this condition and are effaced in the Void [*le néant*].”⁵⁶ These words no doubt infused

⁵³ Jean Hyppolite, “Le Coup de Dés de Stéphane Mallarmé et le Message,” *Les Études Philosophiques*, nouvelle série, Année 13, n. 4, (October-December 1958): 463-4.

⁵⁴ The inexactitude of Véra’s translation is evident in comparing the French version of this passage from section XIX of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, with the standard English one. Véra’s translation is, “la pensée de la pensée, ou de la science de la pensée pure,” (Véra, p. 249) as compared to “The formation of the subject through logic consists in one’s becoming proficient in thinking (since this science is the thinking of thinking) and in one’s coming to have thoughts in one’s head and to know them also as thoughts.-However, since the logical is the absolute form of the truth and, even more than that, the pure truth itself, it is really something quite other than anything merely useful.” See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1991, p. 46.

⁵⁵ Véra’s version of paragraph XX reads: “la philosophie n’a d’autre objet que de transformer les représentations en pensées et les pensées en notions,” Véra, p. 250. The English passage is: “The distinction between representation and thought is all the more important because we can say in general that philosophy does nothing but transform representations into thoughts-although, of course, it does go on to transform the mere thought into the Concept,” Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ “L’on montrera, dans la logique, que la pensée et le général sont d’abord eux-mêmes et puis leur contraire, qu’ils vont au delà de celui-ci, et qu’ils y effacent le néant.” Véra, p. 250. The English translation is: “It will be seen in the *Logic* that this is just what thought and the universal are: that thought is itself and its other, that it overgrasps its other and that nothing escapes it.” Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 50. Véra adds a note to qualify the use of “néant,” which he has inserted into the text: “that is to say, the negation of

Mallarmé's understanding of the science of language as the "general expression of our intellect" (OCI 507).

In these words by Hegel (especially as slightly distorted in Véra's translation), Mallarmé would have discovered a profound treatment of a problem inherent to the (nineteenth-century) science of language: that the object of inquiry (language) and the method or medium of inquiry (language) are identical to one another, leaving, it would seem, no room for analytical detachment. Confronting this problem, Hegel developed a theory by which he proposed to attain a definition of *language in general*, beneath the particularity of any given enunciation, and to ascertain its relationship to thought. For the philosopher, the difficulty was that thought and language set into play contradictory relations between the particular and the general: "And because *language* is the work of thought, nothing can be said in language that is not universal. What I only *mean* [*meine*] is *mine* [*mein*]; it belongs to me as this particular individual. But if language expresses only what is universal, then I cannot say what I only *mean*."⁵⁷ That is, while no particular word can express the "general" as such, Hegel noted that language possesses the capacity to refer to general concepts, and gives the example of several "shifters"—"*the singular*" '*this singular*,' 'here,' 'now,'"—and asserted that "all of these expressions are universalities."⁵⁸ Paradoxically, then, it is precisely because these words point to the most specific particulars, rooted in a given context determined by the speaker, while being

which the void or non-being is the most general form." ["C'est à dire la négation dont le néant ou le non-être est la forme la plus général."] Véra, p. 250.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 50. Véra renders the passage in this way, "Le langage étant l'oeuvre de la pensée, il n'y a aucun mot qui n'exprime le général. Mes pensées, mes opinions purement individuelles n'appartiennent qu'à moi; voilà pourquoi je ne puis les communiquer, puisque le langage n'exprime que le général." Véra, p. 250.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 51.

infinitely general—the same sign being used to point to any number of irreconcilable givens—that they demonstrate thought’s absolutizing capacity within language.

The most vivid example of the dialectical unity of the general and the particular in language is the word “I.” In a passage that must have stunned Mallarmé, Hegel wrote, “Similarly when I say ‘I,’ I *mean me as this one* excluding all others; but what I say (‘I’) is precisely everyone, an ‘I’ that excludes all others from itself.”⁵⁹ The word “I,” for Hegel, demonstrated absolute “communality” and absolute individualization, therefore, “the universal in and for itself”: “All other humans have this in common with me, to be ‘I,’ just as all *my* sensations, representations, etc. have in common that they are *mine*.”⁶⁰ The pronouncement of the word “I” by a given subject actualizes, in the manner of a performative, the capacity of thought to lay claim to the world, its particular objects and representations, through the generalizing power of language.

For Hegel, the seemingly “trivial” matter of how humans use the word “I” to mean *me*, a “singular, quite determinate person,” ends up demonstrating “thought present in its complete purity” because of the universalizing capacity of the “I”—which is common to all thinking humans.⁶¹ Therefore, the “‘I’ is pure being-for-itself, in which everything particular is negated and sublated—consciousness as ultimate, simple, and pure.”⁶² Here, Hegel points to the negative power of language, which by “*thinking-over*” any intuited particularity with the most communal and neutral of tools destroys the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Véra renders the passage: “De même, lorsque je dis *moi*, j’entends par là le moi que je suis, et qui exclut tous les autres *moi*; mais ce que j’appelle *moi* est *chaque moi*, qui, comme le mien, exclut tous les autres.” Véra, p. 251.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 51. Véra, pp. 251-252.

⁶¹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 57.

⁶² *Ibid.*

object's specificity.⁶³ In his analysis of this section of the *Logic*, Paul de Man points to the paradox wherein thought can lay claim to the infinity of particulars in the world through language, but it can do so only due to language's innate capacity for *generalization*, to the point where "the validity of thought resides in its generality."⁶⁴ Commenting on the "I" as an exemplar of the sign in general, de Man continues, "Thus the sign, random and singular at its first position, turns into symbol just as the I, so *singular* in its independence from anything that is not itself, becomes, in the general thought of logic, the most inclusive, plural, general, and impersonal of subjects. As such, it is also the most disinterested and self-effacing of subjects."⁶⁵

In the first section of Hegel's *Logic*, then, Mallarmé would have encountered a theory of language as a negative principle operating via the destruction and sublation of the individual personality. As Hegel put it, "'I' is this void, this receptacle for anything and everything, that for which everything is and which preserves everything within itself. Everyone is a whole world of representations, which are buried in the night of the 'I.'"⁶⁶ Experiencing his own "night of the 'I'", Mallarmé wrote in his correspondence, with alternating exaltation and vertigo, the famous words, discussed in Chapter One:

I have created my Oeuvre solely by *elimination*, and each acquired truth was born only through the loss of an impression that, having sparkled, was consumed and allowed me, thanks to these liberated shadows, to advance more deeply into the sensation of the Absolute Shadows. Destruction was my Béatrice.⁶⁷

⁶³ See the discussion of "thinking-over" and subjectivity in paragraph 23, in *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry*, v. 8, n. 4 (Summer 1982): p. 768

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 57.

⁶⁷ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 348-349

In this “excavation of verse,” Mallarmé experienced his own death in writing: “I am now impersonal, and no longer the Stéphane you once knew—but the aptitude of the Spiritual Universe to reflect itself and to develop through what once was me.”⁶⁸ Elsewhere, he puts it decisively: “I am dead and resuscitated with the jeweled key to my final spiritual casket.”⁶⁹ The “Notes on Language” and the study of Hegel can be considered as an attempt by Mallarmé to *sublate* in theory this experience of death, to redeem the experience of anonymity in language and transform it into a positive principle. As Leo Bersani put it, “Mallarmé considers the death he speaks of in his letters not as the end of his literary career, but as the condition of literary productivity.”⁷⁰

As Jean-Pierre Richard wrote in his groundbreaking study of Mallarmé, “Hegel reveals to him the unexpected power of this *néant*: destruction can recreate, failure is necessary for victory.”⁷¹ For Hegel, as he put it in the third volume of the *Encyclopedia* on the “Philosophy of Mind,” the sign as such is a manifestation of “the negativity of intelligence,” because “The intuition—in its natural phase a something given and given in space—acquires, when employed as a sign, the peculiar characteristic of existing only as superseded and sublimated.”⁷² And yet, even as the intuition (which is to say, the sensory

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 312.

⁷⁰ Leo Bersani, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 26. Bersani’s exemplary book stands as the only sustained study, in any language, of the meaning of impersonality and anonymity in Mallarmé’s work. While the present chapter will depart from Bersani’s reading in several ways (by dint of not being rooted in the psychoanalytical tradition, and by setting to one side the crucial question of how Mallarmé’s poetry stages the libidinal drives), it follows his suggestion that “We might even define Mallarmé’s major enterprise—astonishing as this may seem—as an effort to do away with literature.” *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷¹ Richard, *L’univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, p. 231.

⁷² Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, Trans. William Wallace, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 77.

experience of physical reality) is *negated* in its concrete specificity by being replaced in thought by a wholly arbitrary sign, it is *sublated* into meaning in the process of being used in language.

The negativity of signification is therefore, for Hegel, a model or even *the* model of the negativity of the dialectic. As Derrida puts it, “the content of the sensory intuition (the signifier) must erase itself, must vanish before *Bedeutung* [thought], before the signified ideality, all the while conserving itself and conserving *Bedeutung*; and it is only in time, or rather *as* time itself that this *relève* [sublation] can find its passageway.”⁷³ Ideality, for Hegel, is “the *negation* of the real, but a negation where the real is put past, virtually retained (*virtualiter erhalten*), although it does not *exist*.”⁷⁴ Further, for Hegel, precisely *because* “the predominant part of the sounds in a language is linked purely by chance with the ideas expressed thereby,” the “lifting up” or sublation [*Aufhebung* in German or *relève* in French] of this arbitrary sign into meaning is nothing less than the actualization of human freedom.⁷⁵ “All [mind] has to do now is to realize this notion of its freedom, and get rid of the *form* of immediacy with which it once more begins.”⁷⁶ The

⁷³ Derrida, “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology,” in *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 89. Bundled here are several propositions: time is space’s *Aufhebung*, and the signifier, as spatial intuition, is sublated in the signified (where the ideality of the idea bursts forth from the sign’s materiality, thereby at once destroying and preserving it).

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 92. As Charles Taylor puts it, “The argument reflects not just the impossibility of bare unmediated knowledge of the particular, but also the movement underlying experience itself. As particular sensuous beings, we encounter particular things, we come across them, as it were, with our senses. But as soon as we try to grasp them, they disappear, so to speak; we can hold onto them only by subsuming them under a concept. In Hegelian language, our attempt to grasp things in knowledge first negates them as particulars; then, negating this negation, we recover them by grasping them through mediated conceptual consciousness. The immediate is negated, but it is retained in mediated form.” Charles Taylor, “The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology of Spirit,” in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Alasdair MacIntyre. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972, p. 167.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, v. I, Trans. TM Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 304.

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 60.

production of a sign, for Hegel, stands as the supreme manifestation of consciousness' freedom, precisely because the connection between a sign's meaning and its form is arbitrary and has to be forged, as if by fiat, by the mind's productivity.⁷⁷ Therefore, Hegel writes, the word "'I' is the existence of the entirely abstract universality, the abstractly free."⁷⁸

Hegel's dialectical proposition that the very negativity of language, the very characteristic that seemed to plunge the "I" into darkness, was what provided humanity's access to universality and the exercise of freedom, has a profound connection with Mallarmé's thinking at the time. And yet, the final stage in Mallarmé's notes on language inverts Hegel's argument that the impersonality of language provided the possibility for the inter-subjective exercise of reason.⁷⁹ Instead Mallarmé asserted, "conversation is the essential process of Language," not in the sense of rational-critical debate or as an abstract principle of reasoned exchange, "but in its Fiction" (OCI 508). Mallarmé held that conversation is based upon a tacit presumption shared between participants, that "these sounds are equivalent to this idea, that these sounds modified in such and such a fashion signify this [idea], and that, having found a neutral language, if there is one, that

⁷⁷ Derrida comments, "This allows us better to comprehend the meaning of arbitrariness: the production of arbitrary signs manifests the freedom of the spirit. And there is more manifest freedom in the production of the sign than in the production of the symbol. In the sign spirit is more independent and closer to itself. In the symbol, conversely, it is a bit more exiled into nature." Derrida, "Pit and the Pyramid," p. 86.

⁷⁸ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 51. As de Man puts it, "To the extent that the sign is entirely independent with regard to the objective, natural properties of the entity toward which it points and instead posits properties by means of its own powers, the sign illustrates the capacity of the intellect to "use" the perceived world for its own purposes, to efface (*tilgen*) its properties and to put others in their stead. This activity of the intellect is both a freedom, since it is arbitrary, and a coercion, since it does violence, as it were, to the world." De Man, "Sign and Symbol," p. 767.

⁷⁹ Jim Vernon explains, "Because we have no immediate access to the minds of others, we require a medium through which we can inter-subjectively share our subjective experience with others. This medium, Hegel claims, is language. Language arises as an inter-subjective medium employed to demonstrate the objectivity of our (determining forms of) experience." Vernon, p. 3.

such a sound *par excellence* signifies this, has such a value” (OCI 510). The very impersonality of language, however, its basis in arbitrary connections forged through history into convention, implied for Mallarmé that this whole process, the very possibility of human exchange through language, rested upon a fiction. However, just as Mallarmé’s metaphysical disillusionment led him to see that “we are but vain forms of matter—but sublime for having invented God and the soul,” he did not disparage Fiction as mere falsehood.⁸⁰ Rather, “fiction seems to be the human spirit’s very process” (OCI 504).

Fiction for Mallarmé, as Jacques Rancière summarizes it, is a kind of “hyperbolic doubt”:

The point is to give Fiction a much more radical meaning. Fiction may well be a game. But this game is higher in essence. It is the ‘very procedure of the human spirit’. Let us understand: of the human spirit insofar as it is human; that is, the human spirit insofar as no god guarantees it any truth – in short, the Cartesian method insofar as it does not encounter any veracious god.⁸¹

In the absence of a divine suture between the word and the world embodied by the *Logos*, Mallarmé proposed that the link between the signifier and the signified, viz. the anchor of the human enterprise of meaning production, was a useful fiction through which humanity engaged with the *Verbe*, the truth of language “that develops itself through the negation of all principles, chance” (OCI 505).

In Mallarmé’s dialectical model of language, the fact of the word’s emptiness, its basis in chance, confronted the language user with something like an experience of death, or of becoming-impersonal; and yet, it is that very “defect” in language that allowed language’s mobility and flux through history, which is to say, the possibility of its incarnating “the human spirit’s very process,” through the ever-renewed fiction of mutual

⁸⁰ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 297.

⁸¹ Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, Trans. Steven Corcoran, New York: Continuum, 2011, p. 22.

understanding. In a very practical sense, Mallarmé noted, “Ultimately, words have many meanings, were this not the case we would always understand one another” (OCI 508-509). In this way, Mallarmé displaced the semanticity of language into the realm of the hypothetical. Fiction ultimately is the will of humanity—“humanity is reduced to its will”—to produce meaning, not just despite, but through the generalizing negativity of language, its destructive potential to cast the particularity of the phenomenal world into the impersonal void of representation. Fiction is a “game” that serves to “render to the word, which can be so viciously stereotyped by us, its mobility” and therefore to guarantee the perpetual flux of language throughout history (OC 510). As Blanchot put it, bridging the gap between Mallarmé and Hegel,

Language is of a divine nature, not because it renders eternal by naming, but because, says Hegel, ‘it immediately overturns what it names in order to transform it into something else,’ saying of course only what is not, but speaking precisely in the name of this nothingness that dissolves all things, it being the becoming speech of death itself and yet interiorizing this death, purifying it, perhaps, in order to reduce it to the unyielding work of the negative through which, in an unceasing combat, meaning comes toward us, and we toward it.⁸²

It is above all this sense of Fiction or radical doubt that the *papiers collés* as discussed above share with the Mallarméan model of impersonality. Within the matrix of a single newspaper page, Picasso plumbed a near infinity of incidental language, presenting words that actualized Mallarmé’s sense that language was ontologically founded in chance. Yet far from foreclosing the possibility of interpretation, far from issuing an injunction against reading the words, the negativity of the *papiers collés* and their industrial language—like the principle of *hazard* determining Mallarmé’s *Verbe*—sets into play, and *infinitezes*, what was, at least for Mallarmé, “the human spirit’s very

⁸² Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Trans. Susan Hanson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 35.

process” guaranteed by the impersonality and mobility of language. And it is from that neutral space that, ceaselessly, “meaning comes toward us, and we toward it.”

Cubism, Industrial Color and the Rhetoric of Purity

“Flags are the only thing you get to see in color.”
- Marcel Duchamp to Walter Pach, 19 January 1915 (AM 30)

It is time—perhaps past time—to address a potential objection. Mallarmé’s account of language’s impersonality, to say nothing of Hegel’s, indisputably constructed a rhetoric and an aesthetic of purity, from his rigorous pursuit of linguistic self-reflexivity to his avowal of the “pure work” that would imply the poet’s disappearance. This would seem enough, already, to set Mallarmé’s model of signification at a considerable distance from Picasso and Braque’s *papiers collés*, which radically despoil the work of art through an embrace of material heterogeneity, as evinced by Apollinaire’s famous litany: “You can paint with whatever you like, with pipes, postage stamps, postcards, playing-cards, candelabras, pieces of oilcloth, shirt-collars, wallpaper or newspapers.”⁸³

While it is clear that the *papiers collés* cannot and should not be reduced to a model of purity as medium-specificity or to an “aestheticist” position of withdrawal from the social world, the question of “purity” cannot be dismissed for the simple reason that it was bound up, in the language of the period in question, with the entire problematic of the impersonal and anonymous. But the most immediate reason to investigate the rhetoric of purity was that this was precisely the language used by Picasso himself to describe his work at the moment of the invention of collage.

⁸³ Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters* (1913), trans. Peter Read. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p. 39.

In a curious note jotted down in his Sorgues sketchbook from Summer 1912, Picasso reflected, “Une idée de peinture ne sera pure si on peut la exprimer dans un autre paysage/langage que le sien la peinture” [sic]: “An idea of painting will not be pure if it can be expressed in a landscape/language other than its own, painting” (Figure 2.14).⁸⁴ Picasso’s loose handwriting has given rise to alternate readings of this note—with the editors of the *Musée Picasso’s Sketchbooks* transcribing it as “*paysage*” or landscape and Peter Read for example rendering it as “*langage*” or language.⁸⁵ Neither of these readings, however, would resolve the note’s seemingly contradictory status, or our difficulty in reconciling it with the artworks that Picasso had been producing in those months. For just as Picasso advanced, in a private note, an “idea of painting” that would secure its “purity” by speaking its own tongue or circumscribing its own borders, his paintings incorporated, wrote directly on the canvas, the alien language of posters, handbills, billboards, and newspapers, which is to say, the reality of the modern urban landscape.

If one resists the temptation to dismiss the statement by reading it as merely contradictory or potentially as a piece of café chatter Picasso copied down with little real purchase on his work, then a question presents itself: What aesthetic model or definition of “purity” could possibly be capacious enough to encompass the variety of strategies being developed at that moment by Picasso and Braque, strategies that seem precisely to assault the “purity” or integrity of painting?

⁸⁴ Brigitte Léal, *Carnets: Catalogue des dessins, v. 1*, p. 221.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221. Peter Read, *Picasso and Apollinaire: The Persistence of Memory*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, p. 75.

I propose that the status of Cubist color in spring and summer 1912, after a long period of near monochrome painting and a few months before the emergence of the *papiers collés*, was one of the sites in which the dialectic between aesthetic autonomy and social heteronomy attained a particular intensity. For at this juncture, color seemed to attain its purity—its new salience and independence in planes of unmixed and highly keyed color—only on the condition of becoming totally reified, of taking on the aggressively artificial coloring of posters and advertisements. These stereotyped colors with no access to nature, what’s more, were often painted in Ripolin-brand industrially produced enamel, straight from the can and carrying the glaring sheen of the commodity.

While in Sorgues that summer, Picasso had been working on what he called in letters to Kahnweiler a “landscape with a factory, houses, billboards,” or a “landscape with posters,” the painting in Osaka now known by that latter title, which constitutes a limit-case of the cubist work on color (Figure 2.15).⁸⁶ It depicts an arid cityscape with a smokestack visible in the top left quadrant mostly built out of a frontal network of planes, punctured by a few portals providing token instances of depth. In this sense, it is reminiscent of the few other landscapes of the previous year, such as the Guggenheim’s *Paysage de Céret* from August 1911 (Figure 2.16). But unlike the diaphanous shimmer of the Céret landscape’s “monochrome divisionism”, the Sorgues landscape is anchored by advertising color painted in Ripolin enamel, color that is neither technically nor metaphorically local.⁸⁷ Looming over the bleak structures of the city are three large surfaces, the colors of which parody the primaries: a harsh pink with the word *Léon*, the

⁸⁶ On June 29th, he wrote to Kahnweiler, “I’ve already begun three paintings. An Arlésienne, a still life, a landscape with posters,” and again on July 4th, “Here I’ve begun a still life and done a fair amount of work on a landscape with a factory, houses, billboards...” Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, pp. 397-98.

⁸⁷ See the discussion of “monochrome divisionism,” in Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, pp. 186-187.

name of a hat manufacturer; a billboard sized bottle of *Pernod Pils*, less the sickly pallor of drinkable absinthe than green as employed emblematically in the advertising system; and a billboard, poster, or outsized packaging for *Kub* whose acidic yellow-brown mimics the brothy color of Kub bouillon and also cannily stereotypes the signature restricted palette of “High” Cubism.

Breaking with the chromatic asceticism of the previous two years, the painting presents jarringly artificial hues seemingly pasted onto the surface of the canvas rather than set back into illusionistic depth. In other words, when color returned to Cubism, it was materially and mimetically denatured: not only did Picasso use Ripolin industrial enamel to set the colored surfaces off from the rest of the painting, but color was almost exclusively bound to flat surfaces such as flags, posters, and advertisements. Picasso, we know, was immediately enthusiastic about this new pictorial tool, writing to Kahnweiler in June 1912 about his most recent works, “It’s the paintings done with Ripolin, or Ripolin-style that are the best.”⁸⁸ In a statement recalled by Gertrude Stein, Picasso claimed that the Ripolin, applied straight from the can, gave him access to what he called “*la santé des couleurs*.”⁸⁹ As Elizabeth Cowling puts it, “What he found ‘healthy’ were the very qualities which distinguished Ripolin from traditional artists’ oils—the flat, opaque, resilient, fluid and slightly shiny surface, and above all its identification with utility and commerce.” “When using Ripolin he felt closer to the ordinary worker,” Cowling notes—a point to which I will return.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Picasso writes to Kahnweiler on 20 June 1912 from Céret, “Ce sont les tableaux Ripolin ou genre Ripolin que son le mieux. Vraiment il i a des tableaux pas mal dans tout ça et maintenant que je vois ceux que je vais vous envoyer je ne les trouve pas mal.” Cited in Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris: Collection Kahnweiler-Leiris*, Paris: Le Musée, 1984, p. 169.

⁸⁹ Cited in Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning*, New York: Phaidon Press, 2002, p. 230.

And yet, Picasso's most devoted collectors seemed uninterested or actively repelled by the new cubist color and its sheen of commerce, and certainly did not seem to share his view of its inherent "healthiness". Picasso wondered about Sergei Shchukin, "What must he think of Ripolin and the lettering?" and noted to Kahnweiler on June 17th, "You tell me that Uhde does not like my recent paintings where I use Ripolin and flags. Perhaps we shall succeed in disgusting everyone, and we haven't said everything yet...."⁹¹

The Picasso myth-industry started early to assert the Spanish painter's priority over Braque in the new coloristic experiments by hinting that the French painter was among the ranks of the disgusted. Severini, for example, recalled Braque's astonishment in Picasso's Bateau-Lavoir studio upon seeing these new works in early May, which prominently featured "industrial color"⁹² to render the French tricolor, in *Souvenir du Havre* and three oval works with fragments of "*Notre avenir est dans l'air*," the largest and most developed being *The Scallop Shell* (Figure 2.17). Upon seeing these paintings and their high coloring, Severini reported that Braque exclaimed, "in a tone half sour half sweet" "*On change son fusil d'épaule?*," implying that Picasso was a turncoat, while the latter silently filled his pipe with a wry smile.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁹¹ Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 395, 400. On September 18th, Picasso wrote to Gertrude Stein, "The day of my departure, at Kahnweiler's, I met Mr. Shchukin, who bought another large picture, much like the large, red-style painting at your place. He doesn't understand the more recent things." *Ibid.*, p.403.

⁹² To my knowledge, Pierre Daix was the first to use the expression "industrial color" in reference to Braque's *papiers collés*. Pierre Daix, "Braque and Picasso at the Time of the *Papiers Collés*," in *Braque: the Papiers collés*, ed. Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1982 p. 40.

⁹³ "*On change son fusil d'épaule?*" translates literally to "so we're changing the shoulder we shoot from?" In another version of the anecdote, according to Severini, Braque was surprised by this turn in Picasso's work when he saw them in the Bateau-Lavoir, and remarked (sarcastically, Severini implies), "So we're changing our tune." Yet, this story seems unlikely, as Braque had already in Spring 1912 produced the

Yet the rather bracing return of color seems to have been a mutual or at least nearly simultaneous discovery, perhaps even dating from discussions shared between Picasso and Braque during the time spent together in Le Havre in April 1912. Even a cursory look at the record reveals Braque as equally audacious in his use of color. For example, the extraordinarily vulgar pink of Picasso's *Landscape with Posters*, seems to have been first introduced by Braque as a kind of asignifying toxic haze floating at the border of the oval canvas *Glasses and Bottles*, then programmatically deployed in the form of a handbill in *Violin and Clarinet* and *Violin: "Mozart/Kubelick"* in early Spring (Figure 2.18), in which the pink smear contrasts with the otherwise excremental palette. The notion that Braque was scandalized by Picasso's use of color is belied not only by these paintings, but also by a letter he wrote to Picasso on July 10th, 1912, expressing his admiration for the new Ripolin works. Braque had dropped by Kahnweiler's gallery to see a group of paintings that the dealer had picked up from the Bateau-Lavoir, while Picasso was in Sorgues, which included several Ripolin paintings, such as the *Scallop Shell* and *the Spanish Still Life*. Braque wrote to Picasso, "I've just left *chez K* and the paintings have finally arrived. They are extremely *jolies*: the violin above all struck me as

audacious *Violin: Mozart Kubelick*. Severini cites the putative conflict to demonstrate "how admirably Picasso maintains his freedom of action, which enables him to 'change his tune' whenever he wants or needs to, while making his presence strongly felt in whatever direction he goes." Severini, *Cinquanta Disegni di Pablo Picasso (1903-1938) con scritti di Carlo Carrà, Enrico Prampolini, Alberto Savinio, Gino Severini, Ardengo Soffici*, Novara, 1943, p. 22. Reproduced in translation by PS Falla in Marilyn McCully, *A Picasso Anthology: Documents, Criticism, Reminiscences*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1981, p. 73. The story is also recounted this way: "Severini was in the Bateau-Lavoir studio when Braque first saw these works; according to him, Braque was astonished (probably by the high coloring Picasso had introduced into his painting), then retorted, in a tone that was half sour, half sweet: 'The weapons have been changed.' Picasso said nothing, however, continuing to fill his pipe, with a typical smile that might have meant, 'A fine joke, eh?'" Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 390.

a painting of capital importance. *Très très jolie...* I hope to see many more like this on my trip to Sorgues.”⁹⁴

The *Violin* that struck Braque was likely *Violin, Wineglass, Pipe and Anchor*, painted that May (Figure 2.19). Following up on the maritime theme of the *Souvenir du Havre*, the work features the fragment “Avre,” and a large anchor transecting a violin. The anchor is schematically rendered with a cruciform shape in the top right, topped with a circle that makes it look like a stopper in a jug, and an arrow at the center of the canvas, as though piercing through the painting itself. The top half features three passages of Ripolin enamel divided into unmixed panels of primary colour: a blue corner of the French flag, or potentially a poster with the letters BO, the number 75 in bright red, and two fragmented planes of yellow. In a letter to Kahnweiler, Picasso titled the work, “*Le violon d’Ingres à vous avec Ripolin*,” and asked “Tell me if Kramar has taken the recent Ripolin paintings; I imagine he might have. I am curious to know which ones.”⁹⁵ Indeed, the Czech collector and art historian Vincenc Kramar purchased this violin soon afterward, proving himself, as per usual, one of the most adventurous early supporters of Cubism. In a notebook entry on this painting, translated by Nicholas Sawicki, Kramar

⁹⁴ This letter, unpublished to my knowledge, is held in the Musée Picasso (Musée Picasso APES 1725, 10.7.12). As for the proof that Ripolin works were among those Braque saw “chez K,” in an undated letter, most likely sent while Picasso was in Céret in Spring or Summer 1912, Kahnweiler listed a number of works that he picked up from the Bateau-Lavoir studio and brought to his gallery, including the first works done with color: *Souvenir du Havre*, *Nature Morte Espagnole*, two small oval *L’avenir dans l’air* (including one with rope), *La Coquille Saint Jacques*, and “*La Toile cirée (petit oval)*” (undoubtedly *Still life with chair caning*) (Musée Picasso archives, correspondance de DH Kahnweiler, cl. 69). In a letter from May 20, 1912, written from the Grand Café in Céret, Picasso asked Kahnweiler to pick up works from the rue Ravignan and send certain of them to him in Céret; in another letter from the 24th, he asked Kahnweiler—“(actually I’m embarrassed to have to trouble you so)”—to mail him his paints, palette, paintbrushes, stretchers, stencils for letters and numbers and “the combs for making faux bois.” Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 392. In another letter from May 1912, Kahnweiler buys several works, including a “Tête d’homme (avec ripolin jaune)” for 300 francs (Musée Picasso Archives, Correspondance avec DH Kahnweiler, cl. 69, Letter dated “May 11, 1912”). (DR cat. 468)

⁹⁵ Cited in Nicholas Sawicki, “Ripolin, flags and wood: Picasso’s ‘Violin, wineglass, pipe and anchor’ (1912) and its Cubist frame,” *Burlington Magazine*, N. 1342, V. 157 (January 2015): p. 20

described the passages of blue and yellow as deriving from commercially printed “posters.” He also wrote, “Absolute yellow triumphs here completely. Blue for itself (...), a counterweight to yellow” and then, of the lettering at the base, he noted “BAL (in Le Havre with Braque, a visit to a dance, which he enjoyed – on a white wall there were painted flags and BAL, which he liked very much).”⁹⁶ Kramar also claimed that the BO derived from a “poster of a boxer,” the specificity of which leads one to speculate that he was reporting something Picasso or Kahnweiler had told him.⁹⁷ We could speculate further that the simplified anchor—with all its trompe l’oeil effect—might in fact derive from a flat surface, a graphic design on a poster in a dockside dance hall.

Kramar’s language of “absolute” yellow and “blue for itself” seems to capture the tenor of the discussions about the flat areas of unmodulated color that Picasso and Braque began to incorporate into their painting following their working vacation in Le Havre that April. It was this line of thought that led Braque, for his part, to insist on a direct link between their experimentation with color and the emergence of collage. While the austere collages executed by Braque with charcoal and wallpaper during his visit to Picasso in Sorgues that fall could be construed as a return to monochromy (Figure 2.20), Braque argued in a later interview that his collages emerged from a preoccupation with color: “I have said many times, said and repeated, that for us the culmination of color came with the *papiers collés*. The dissociation of color and form, you understand? The independence of this color with respect to form.”⁹⁸ Braque seems to be suggesting that

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ André Verdet, *Entretiens notes et écrits sur la peinture*, Nantes: Éditions du petit véhicule, 2000, p. 21. In another statement, cited by Daix, Braque claimed, “With that [*papier collé*] we arrived at dissociating cleanly color from form and at seeing its independence in relation to form, because that was the main

the logic of color in Cubism led to collage because, with the bulk of pictorial structure produced through line and with traditional surface-depth relationships fractured, color is no longer subordinate to three-dimensional form and modeling. Instead, as in the passages of wood-grain wallpaper, color is no longer a *quality* of a represented body or form, bound to its contours, but a material surface in itself that has gained its “independence,” entering into complex and ever-shifting relationships with line, shade, and depth inflecting them and being inflected by them, as an equal.

John Golding, in his *History and Analysis* of Cubism from 1959, offered a compelling interpretation of Braque’s thinking about color. As he put it,

Braque’s remarks on colour in Cubist painting indicate that the painters wished to use it in a direct way, dissociating it from the modifications imposed on it by variations of light and the modeling of form.... They felt that it could exist as an independent pictorial entity, contributing to spatial and formal sensations but not conditioned by effects of atmospheric light and perspective or by the modeling of forms from lights to darks.⁹⁹

For Golding, then, the “purity” of cubist color had to do with an abstraction of the concept of local color, which is to say the deployment of hue unmodified by the variable conditions of light and spatial recession. Collage, for Golding, is a natural development from Picasso and Braque’s experiments with reintroducing color, because both express, as he puts it, “their concept of the work of art as an autonomous, constructed object. [Collage] seems to have given them a sense of certainty in that they were producing works of art which were part of external reality and not just representations of it.”¹⁰⁰

Following Braque, Golding argues that *papier collé* “enabled the painters to reintroduce

concern. Color acts simultaneously with form, but has nothing to do with it.” Cited in Daix, “Braque and Picasso,” p. 35.

⁹⁹ John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis*, London: Faber and Faber, 1959, pp. 114-115.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

colour directly into their work, as an independent pictorial element.”¹⁰¹ In this reading, then, Braque and Picasso’s claim to the “pure” language or landscape of painting would have to do with color’s dissociation from its descriptive function, its incorporation as a material entity with its own innate tactility and texture in the form of collage or industrial enamels, and its discrepancy with respect to its pictorial surroundings.

If, as Braque and Golding argue, color attained its autonomy because it was no longer subordinate to line, light or shade, these colors were certainly not autonomous with respect to their social content, tied as they are to the form of flags, posters, and advertisements. My initial question can be rephrased: what model of “purity” could account for the irrepressible referentiality of Cubist color, its social life?

One initial answer comes from a perhaps unexpected source. In the section of his *Aesthetics* about the “Symbolic Form of Art,” Hegel meditates on the semiotic status of precisely such colors as Picasso and Braque used in 1912. Hegel describes the flag and the cockade as the exemplars of what he calls the “mere sign,” a kind of precursor or baseline condition of signification. The “sign,” in Hegel’s usage, is to be distinguished, first, from the “symbol,” in which the relation of form and meaning are partially “motivated,” such as when one uses the lion as a symbol of strength because lions really are strong, but without having exhausted the meaning of either strength or of lions. Second, the sign should be distinguished from the work of art, in which form and meaning are completely and organically integrated and indivisible. Hegel argues in a passage worth citing in full:

Now, the symbol is *prima facie* a sign. But in a *mere sign* the connection which meaning and its expression have with one another is only a purely arbitrary linkage. In that case this expression, this sensuous thing or

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

picture, so far from presenting *itself*, brings before our minds a content foreign to it, one with which it does not need to stand in any proper affinity whatever... [An] example of such signs is afforded by the colors which are used in cockades and flags to express the nationality to which an individual or a ship belongs. Such colours likewise have in themselves no quality in common with their meaning, i.e., with the nation that is represented by them.¹⁰²

Hegel goes on to bar the “mere sign” from the realm of art at its highest, precisely because the sign’s *mereness* consists in the “indifference between meaning and expression.” Conversely, the precinct of art is devoted to the “kinship, relation, and concrete interpenetration of meaning and shape,” in which material form and signification are totally adequate to and inseparable from one another.¹⁰³ If, for Braque, the Cubist flags and posters expressed the division of color from form, for Hegel, such colors exhibit the separation of meaning from appearance. In this way, the “mere sign,” the “purely external and formal sign,” such as the flag or cockade, is, for Hegel, similar to speech because “the predominant part of the sounds in a language is linked purely by chance with the idea expressed thereby.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, v. I, p. 304.

¹⁰³ The rich question of the place of art in the relationship between “symbol” and “sign,” for Hegel cannot occupy us here. For now, it is enough to cite Paul de Man and Raymond Geuss’ exchanges on this question, which turn around the question of how strictly the two can be disentangled. While de Man assimilates art to the category of the symbol, in which meaning and form are congruent, and argues that the sign (in its “mereness”) is incompatible with both, Geuss argues that the sign and the symbol are not distinct phenomena, but that the latter is a more advanced stage of the former. Geuss furthermore insists that art, for Hegel, is not, strictly speaking, “symbolic,” but represents the highest stage of symbiosis between outer form and inner significance. In this reading, “Symbolic Art” is not art *per se*, but rather a form of proto-art [*Vorkunst*]. See Raymond Geuss “Critical Response I: A Response to Paul de Man,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Dec., 1983), pp. 376-377.

¹⁰⁴ He continues, “So in languages, for example, the sounds are a sign of some idea, feeling, etc. But the predominant part of the sounds in a language is linked purely by chance with the ideas expressed thereby, so far as their content is concerned, even if it can be shown, by an historical development, that the original connection was of another character; and the difference between languages consists chiefly in the fact that the same idea is expressed by a difference in sounds.” Hegel, *Aesthetics v. I*, p. 304.

Hegel's examples of the "mere sign"—the colors of "cockades and flags" and the word itself—are precisely the two elements that Picasso and Braque began to import into the work of art in 1912 (Figure 2.16). In this way, the cubist deployment of color and of language at its most fragmentary and heteronomous, advertising their semiological mereness, ruptures the plenum characteristic for Hegel of the work of art. Faced with such colors and surfaces that abolish any organic unity between form and meaning, we confront what Hegel called the "dubiety" of the sign, the "essentially ambiguous" link between "each of the two sides, the meaning and its shape."¹⁰⁵ It is perhaps telling that Picasso chose the flag as the sign in which this dubiety is most polarized: on the one hand, the French or Spanish tricolors carry the most hardwired ideological meaning, linked to one's nationality and linguistic tradition, and yet, on the other, the colours of the flag are "merely" "conventional," meaningless in themselves.¹⁰⁶ However, Hegel was far from denigrating the "mere" sign in comparison with the symbol. As we know from Hegel's discussion of language in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, the ability of human consciousness to forge relations between a generic and arbitrary signifier, on the one hand, and an idea or meaning with which it has nothing natural in common, on the other, manifests the highest capacity of thought, and the freedom of human cognition. From this point of view, Picasso's flags and advertisements attain the condition of "purity" precisely due to their distance from nature, their arbitrariness, and neutrality.

I am suggesting that the gap existing between the materiality of color and its meaning, this space of chance opened up within the chromatic sign itself, is precisely

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹⁰⁶ "No doubt its ambiguity is removed from the symbol, strictly so-called, if, on account of this very uncertainty, the linkage of the sensuous picture with the meaning is made customary, and becomes more or less conventional—as is indispensably requisite in a mere sign" *Ibid.*, p. 308-9.

what attracted Picasso and Braque to the industrial colors that they employed. If they turned to colors that were already deprived of any stable mimetic relationship to the world, this was all the better for them to construct their elaborate play with the viewer's cognitive processes. For the rigorous linear schema to which painting had been reduced by Picasso and Braque had excluded color precisely for its almost inevitable establishment of a sensuous relationship to visual reality. This had, of course, been color's purview at least since the Renaissance pitted it against the intellectual connotations of *disegno*. The colors of posters, flags, and advertisements were perhaps the only colors that could be introduced into Picasso and Braque's paintings without bringing along with them the baggage of implicit naturalism.

This still, however, leaves unresolved the link between the "purity" of such colors and their manifest social content in national identity and commodity culture, to say nothing of the unavoidably commercial associations of the enamel paint itself. The Marxist art historian Max Raphael, student of Georg Simmel and Heinrich Wölfflin, provides some points of departure. In an open letter to the *Die Brücke* painter Max Pechstein, published in the German periodical *Pan* on May 9th, 1912, Raphael (under the pseudonym M.R. Schönlank) offered a remarkably early eye-witness to Picasso's first works with industrial color.¹⁰⁷ Raphael was responding to an article published in the previous issue by Pechstein, in which the latter asserted, "A logical Cubist like Picasso must have been attracted by the idea of completely *dispensing* with hues; setting forth his exemplar purely in black and white, in rhythmic lines and planes. And this is what

¹⁰⁷ Max Raphael [MR Schönlank], "Lieber Herr Pechstein!," *Pan*, Year 2, N. 25 (9 May 1912): pp. 738-739. The text is translated in McCully, p. 91-92.

Picasso has done, as an intellectual, ruminating over the language of form.”¹⁰⁸ Opposing Pechstein’s characterization of Picasso as a detached intellectual, Raphael countered with the most recent news from the Bateau Lavoir, to which he had been a regular visitor since 1911¹⁰⁹:

Let us not speak of tonal value and hue. *What will you say if I tell you that Picasso has shown me recent pictures in which he has used pure blue and red as the pure matter of painting—not the colour of Matisse, of course, but pure matter in its full force?* ... It is my firm conviction that *Picasso’s art must have as its consequence a new aesthetics and a new attitude to life.* ... Let us create form with all our strength and not speak of the means we use. For the important thing is our world!¹¹⁰

This letter from Raphael is compelling evidence of his having seen, in whatever state of completion, at least one of the extremely “recent” paintings that Picasso did featuring the French flag in Ripolin, such as the *Souvenir du Havre* or the *Scallop Shell*, or even the *Violin* that Braque liked so much, which were each finished by May. Although Raphael’s description does not specify the materialization of such “pure” color in the form of a nation-state emblem, he puts visionary emphasis on Picasso’s color as implying a revolutionary shift in consciousness, a new aesthetics for a new way of life.

If the connection between color as “pure matter in its full force” and a revolution of everyday life was left implicit in Raphael’s letter to Pechstein, he would spell it out further in his *Von Monet zu Picasso* of 1913, an as-yet-untranslated text that stands as a

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 91

¹⁰⁹ Max Raphael visited Picasso in June 1911, as shown by this letter from Raphael to Picasso, “Monsieur, avec une recommandation de Monsieur Uhde j’oserai de vous visiter dans votre atelier Mercredi à 2 heures. Quand je veux écrire un livre sur la peinture moderne avec un chapitre sur vous, j’espère que vous aurez la bonté de me recevoir.” Cited in Hélène Seckel, *Max Jacob et Picasso*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, p. 566.

¹¹⁰ Raphael, “Lieber Herr Pechstein!,” p. 739. McCully, p. 91.

monument in the early reception of Cubism.¹¹¹ There, Raphael described the passage from the chromatic austerity of 1911 to the use of “pure” color and the invention of the papier collé. Raphael concurred with Pechstein in characterizing the Cubist reduced palette of 1910-12 as a search for linear objectivity by abolishing distinctions of hue. However, he added that monochromy had paradoxically delivered the work of art wholly over to the no less arbitrary differentiation of tone: “But light and shade—outside the color contrasts of white and black—were qualitative moments of an unobjective sort and seem to have been felt by Picasso as a compromise.”¹¹² If the “differentiated points” of Picasso’s monochrome divisionism still had “qualitatively suggestive value,” this was no longer the case for the Ripolin “color painted in absolutely flat surfaces.”¹¹³ Here, Raphael wrote, “No more random (merely psychologically conditional) spot tangles, but the most faithful reproduction of real material, whether this function was fulfilled by color as color or as the name for a material (wood, marble).”¹¹⁴ This tendency toward material objectivity led to a vocabulary of “fixed forms, letters... pieces of the real being adopted into the picture-reality, newspaper clippings, for example.”¹¹⁵ For Raphael, finally, such “real” color—by which he means color as sheer matter impervious to qualitative psychological projection—implied the revolutionary shift in vision described

¹¹¹ Raphael’s book *Von Monet zu Picasso* was first published in Munich in 1913, and reissued in 1919. Kramar called it, “La meilleure étude sur l’art de Picasso parue avant la guerre.” Jana Claverie, *Vincenc Kramar: Un théoricien et collectionneur du cubisme à Prague*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002, p. 328. Kahnweiler, however, was less impressed, writing to Kramar on December 4, 1913: “Le livre de Schönlanek ne m’a pas surpris plus que ça; après tout ce qu’il a dit quand je l’ai vu cet automne, j’ai bien vu qu’il ne comprend plus ce que fait Picasso, et comme toujours dans ces cas-là, c’est Picasso qu’il en rend responsable, plutôt que lui-même.” *Ibid.*

¹¹² Max Raphael, *Von Monet zu Picasso*, München: Delphin-Verlag, 1913, pp. 112-113.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 113-114.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

in his letter to Pechstein: “We have in this new way of establishing the relation of surface and space, a wholly different kind of attitude toward life.”¹¹⁶ The fact of color as color, stripped of its qualitative subjectivity, acted as a utopian anticipation of a new worldview, one which Raphael saw epitomized in the impersonality of industrial labor: “Picasso wants his new art object to be measurable through its form. A body must be given such that an intelligent mechanic could rebuild it. An attempt is made to force experience into the impersonal form of the engineer.”¹¹⁷

In Raphael’s proto-Constructivist view, Picasso’s Cubism heralded a passage from the purely subjective and qualitative mode accorded to art within bourgeois culture to an objective and impersonal form of production appropriate to a new world, which Raphael would come to call communism.¹¹⁸ That Picasso may have also held similar views is corroborated by Kahnweiler’s recollection, almost identical to Raphael’s, that “Picasso did, as a matter of fact, entertain the idea in about 1911 that objects should be so represented in a picture that any technician could manufacture them.” (JG 215). André Salmon, in his memoirs, likewise recalls Picasso stating about his first constructed sculpture, the cardboard *Guitar*, “You’ll see. I’ll keep the guitar, but I’ll sell the blueprint; then everybody will be able to make one.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹⁸ For an explicitly Marxist reading of Picasso, see Raphael’s 1933 book *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: three studies in the sociology of art*. Ed. John Tagg, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980.

¹¹⁹ Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin*, p. 82. An actually realized example of Picasso’s dream of outsourcing aesthetic production is the etching *Nature morte au trousseau de clefs: Carte de visite*. Spring 1912, which Picasso described in a letter to Kahnweiler on May 24th, 1912: “The last etching is in the studio. You must have already seen it. I’m still thinking of having a name engraved on a calling card. But you should send me one of the two proofs so I can draw for you the exact place where you should have the letters engraved by a professional engraver, by an engraver of calling cards.” Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 392

In the perspective described by Raphael, then, the utopian impersonality or anonymity of cubist color had to do with, on the one hand, its objectivity and purity, its abolition of subjective and qualitative differentiation, and, on the other hand, its associations with industrial forms of production. In this view, “industrial color” links up with the standardization of form in cubism to present a critique of the exceptional and individualistic status of artistic production in bourgeois society and a form of imagined solidarity with the industrial working class. It does so through the use of accessible and non-artistic materials (such as newspapers, cardboard, and industrial enamel) and the deskilling of artistic production (to the point where the work of art becomes a blueprint or diagram). This is the cubism we imagine Kahnweiler encountered when Picasso and Braque turned up at his gallery in their *bleu mécano* jeans: “They arrived one day cap in hand acting like labourers. ‘Boss,’ they demanded, ‘We’re here for our pay.’”¹²⁰ Cubist color, I would suggest, should be distinguished from Picasso and Braque’s use of stenciling or the faux-bois of the painter’s comb as a celebration of the “beauty of artisanal work,” as Salmon put it.¹²¹ The form of labor being mimed or materialized in the Ripolin paint, as in the newspaper collages, is no longer the organic craft-practices of the artisan, but the fully alienated and rationalized labor of the modern factory worker that was rendering such artisanal practices obsolete: the sort of productive relations pictured in the smokestack and advertisements of *Landscape with Posters*.

If, as Picasso avowed, “I use the language of construction,” he also, we should not forget, used the language of purity, wishing to propose an “idea of painting” that could

¹²⁰ Kahnweiler, *Mes galeries et mes peintres: Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 57.

¹²¹ André Salmon, *La Jeune Sculpture française*. Paris: Société des Trente, 1919, pp. 13-14. Cited in Rubin, *Pioneering Cubism*, p. 20.

not be expressed outside its own native language or landscape.¹²² In this sense, cubist color seems to be perched precariously between two extremes within modernism. On the one hand, there is the lineage running from Picasso through to Mondrian and Delaunay, for example. This stream contains a range of claims, endemic to the spread of abstraction, that pure color, liberated from all natural referentiality and subjective associations, would secure for painting the status of a wholly autonomous and self-reflexive form of structural, phenomenological or even scientific investigation. On the other hand, Cubist color is linked to a counter-tradition within modernism that reached its limits in Soviet Productivism: in this model, the highly differentiated forms of experience and competence developed by artists under the auspices of art's partial autonomy are willfully collapsed by artists into the wider social conditions of fully rationalized and instrumental labor. This transition takes place, for example, between Rodchenko's "last painting" in three monochrome panels of "pure" primary colors to his performance of the artist-as-engineer. Art, in this view, would liberate itself from its purposive purposelessness and participate actively in building the new world that Raphael could only dream of in 1912. If the former view risked quietism and solipsism, the latter risked abandoning art's utopian function and positing an essence of human labour—even under state socialism—that looks suspiciously like that of industrial capitalism, and intensifying rather than opposing the process of reification, in which the personality and humanity of the producer is literally rendered anonymous in the act of production.

I suggest that what makes Cubist industrial color so remarkable is that it holds both these historical and aesthetic options *in potentia*, without however being reducible to either. If Adorno proposed that "Cubism could be interpreted as a form of reaction to ...

¹²² Gilot and Lake, p. 271.

the rationalization of the social world,” Picasso and Braque’s work doesn’t oppose to it claims for color as pure expressivity or as the embodiment of spiritual values being destroyed in the social world at large.¹²³ Rather, Picasso and Braque found that their search for “pure color” had to pass through, had to converge with, color as they encountered it every day, which is to say as a commodity. Picasso and Braque’s color in Spring and Summer 1912 is thus the progenitor of “readymade” color in the twentieth century, a paradigm stretching from the infinite regress of color swatches in Marcel Duchamp’s *Tu m’*, 1918 (Figure 2.21), to Ellsworth Kelly’s use of mass produced colored papers chosen at random as the matrix for his *Colors for a large wall*, 1951. In this mode, color attains a dialectical force, authenticating its “purity” and “autonomy” precisely by passing through restriction and reification. In 1912, Picasso and Braque were able to reinvent modern color and lend it a generative potential for the coming century by constraining the plenitude of chromatic experience to its industrially produced equivalent, selecting from the suite of colors offered on the shelves of the hardware store as one would with any other commodity.

The link between the modernist aesthetic of impersonality and the reification of social relations has been the subject of analysis by Benjamin Buchloh, specifically as it pertains to the emergence of “readymade” or “symbolic” color.¹²⁴ To address this lineage

¹²³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, 2002, p. 301

¹²⁴ Buchloh was also the first, to my knowledge, to suggest the Peircean category of the “symbol” as a means to account for the semiotic status of industrial color in the *Landscape with Posters*: “The Peircian distinction is already established [in cubist color of 1912]. It is utterly dependent on conventions; it has no connotations whatsoever in terms of ‘natural’ sensations, or in terms of the expression of emotion, or in terms of any other charge. It either appears in its symbolic form in both the French and Spanish flags, or it appears in the mass-cultural reference which is utterly artificial, even in terms of its chromatic reduction.” Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, p. 166. For Peirce, the symbol is a fully conventional sign, to be differentiated at the basic level from the index (a sign that refers through a physical connection to its referent) and the icon (a sign that refers through a resemblance to its referent). While these categories can

from cubism to Kelly, Buchloh advanced the concept of the “matrix,” and argued for its status as a “hidden third term” within modernism, an epistemic mode to be classed next to abstraction and the readymade in the histories of avant-garde art.¹²⁵ As in the matrices of mathematics and printmaking, an aesthetic matrix, in Buchloh’s sense, is a pre-given ordering system that “proliferates infinite permutations while maintaining a rigorously defined order. It is a prefixed set of formal, perceptual, and spatial givens that are combined with a prefixed set of operational and procedural terms.”¹²⁶ A matrix is, Buchloh writes, therefore, “simultaneously *confining* and *generative*,” “like the rules of a game,” and can be witnessed in the multitude of operations within twentieth-century art that proposed the limitation of artistic subjectivity to a pre-determined and “impersonal” set of rules, from the grid to the controlled deployment of chance.¹²⁷ The matrix, therefore, is distinct from the various model of modernist reflexivity, which sought intrinsic and positive values to act as self-generating motors of aesthetic progress (grounding of the work within specificity of its medium, for example).¹²⁸ Rather than

rarely be neatly differentiated in actual sign usage, the “symbolic” is largely the precinct of language as a system of conventional (or “arbitrary”) signs. I have not used Peirce’s terms in this chapter in order to avoid confusion with Hegel’s theory of language, in which the “symbol” is distinguished from the “sign” precisely due to its greater degree of motivation. See Charles Sanders Peirce, “What is a Sign?” in *The Essential Peirce, v. II*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 4-10.

¹²⁵ Buchloh “Kelly’s Matrix: Administering Abstraction, Industrializing Color,” *Ellsworth Kelly: Matrix*. New York: Mathew Marks Gallery, 2003, p. 7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ This modernist model was given one of its strongest formulation in Michael Fried’s essay “*Three American Painters*,” which conceived modernist art as a search for a “principle by which painting can change, transform, and renew itself, and by which it is enabled to perpetuate virtually intact, and sometimes even enriched, through each epoch of self-renewal, those of its traditional values that do not pertain directly to representation. Thus modernist art preserves what it can of its history, not as an act of piety toward the past but as a source of value in the present and future.” Michael Fried, “Three American Painters,” in *Art and Objecthood*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 218. Fried’s dialectical historical schema, drawn from Hegel but also from Lukács and Merleau-Ponty, differs from Buchloh’s in its emphasis on the

conceiving modernist reductivity along these lines as a form of “radical self-criticism” or “intellectual and moral alertness,” Buchloh emphasizes through the concept of the matrix a historical experience of confinement, largely “imposed” negatively by the development of capitalist modernity and its progressive elimination of the social conditions that had supported artistic concepts such as “subjective agency; individual expression; and psychic differentiation in gesture, chromatic definition, and structural organization.”¹²⁹

Therefore, the matrix marks a historical dynamic within avant-garde culture wherein the quest for aesthetic “purity” converges with the experience of alienation and constraint. Buchloh traces the genealogy of this tendency from the work of Ellsworth Kelly in the 1950s back to Mallarmé:

Kelly’s discursive precision situates his work closer to Stéphane Mallarmé’s and Marcel Duchamp’s subtle reflections on the extreme confinement and the rigorous disciplinary limitations of poetical experience imposed by modernity, a condition that has generated the aesthetic episteme of the *matrix*: the practice of working within and against the hidden rules of this confinement to convey a sense of veracity in painting. If, according to its Mallarméan origins, the matrix initially came to operate within the registers of language, it appeared thereafter within the registers of structure and linear design, and eventually even within the register of color.¹³⁰

The experience of aesthetic “confinement” can be considered in at least two different ways: first, the preoccupation of modern art with its own technical limitations can be considered *negatively* as a reaction to capitalist society’s conception of art as the privileged sphere of subjective freedom and creative plenitude, precisely the values being

conservative stage of the dialectic: art’s historical progression conserves, through a process of self-criticism, the positive value of the art of the past. In its doing so, Fried argues, modern art achieves its historical and social value not through any particular reference to history or society, but through its self-criticism, which operates on the order of a *moral proposition*, existing as a model of “life lived as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness.” *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²⁹ Buchloh, “Kelly’s Matrix,” p. 7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

abolished from productive conditions at large. Therefore, the insistence on confinement and disciplinary limitation in art mimes the reified social relations obtaining in the rest of the productive world. Second, by performing the discovery of generative potential within confinement, matrixial procedures demonstrate *positively* the production of freedom from within the conditions of unfreedom. Through a dialectical reversal, precisely by pursuing its own objectification with fidelity, the work of art demonstrates the opening of the horizon of the possible, authenticated by passing through restriction and confinement.

By proposing Mallarmé as the initiator of this tendency within modernism, Buchloh is implicitly taking the side of Adorno in his debate with Walter Benjamin concerning the latter's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility." In a letter from 1936, Adorno confessed his dismay at the way that Benjamin "casually transfer[red] the concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign[ed] to the latter a counter-revolutionary function."¹³¹ For Adorno, Benjamin was led (by the "sublimated remnants of certain Brechtian motifs") to ignore or to suppress the "inherently dialectical" nature of aesthetic autonomy, which "within itself... juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom."¹³² Adorno argued that while Benjamin had proposed a dialectical view of reification in the production process—emphasizing that rapid technological development contained within itself the conditions for the eventual abolition of capitalist "technicization and alienation"—he had, conversely, proposed an undialectical conception of the autonomy of the work of art.¹³³

¹³¹ Adorno, "Letter to Walter Benjamin: March 18, 1938," in *Aesthetics and Politics*. New York: Verso Books, 1980, p. 121

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

That is to say, Benjamin recognized that merely to abhor alienation within capitalist production in favor of a prelapsarian social harmony was the hallmark of romantic anti-capitalism—a “bourgeois romanticism of the conservation of the personality and all that stuff,” as Adorno puts it.¹³⁴ But, in Adorno’s view, Benjamin had committed a parallel error with respect to autonomous art by seeking to “revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values,” therefore demonstrating an “anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process.”¹³⁵

It is at this point that Adorno turns to Mallarmé to epitomize the concept of the work of art whose very internalization of reification’s relentless destruction of the personality would render its liberatory function. “I cannot express to you my feeling about your entire essay more clearly,” Adorno wrote, “than by telling you that I constantly found myself wishing for a study of Mallarmé as a counterpoint to your essay, a study which, in my estimation, you owe us as an important contribution to our knowledge.”¹³⁶ Against Benjamin’s description of Mallarmé as a proponent of “a negative theology, in the form of a ‘pure’ art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content,” Adorno countered, “I know of no better materialist programme than that statement by Mallarmé in which he defines works of art as something not inspired but made out of words.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³⁷ Walter Benjamin “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version),” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and other writings on media*, Eds.

For Adorno, Mallarmé expressed the principle (which he also saw at play in Schönberg, for example) that “precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, brings it close to the state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made.”¹³⁸ Mallarmé’s poetry represented, for Adorno, a dialectical conjunction between aesthetic “purity” (a pejorative for Benjamin) and reification. Mallarmé’s opposition to the instrumentalization of language, in Adorno’s terms, did not take the form of a romantic (or “undialectical”) embrace of expressionist spontaneity, nor did it seek the return to a mythic state of linguistic plenitude. Instead, Mallarmé’s “materialist programme” exacerbated the objectification of language to the point where even “the blanks take on a significance” and the fact that “man writes black on white” struck him as a point of crucial aesthetic and poetic significance.

In opposition to the reign of instrumental reason, Mallarmé advanced a model of freedom in language—not, however, in the mythical freedom of spontaneous and authentic self-expression, but rather in unflagging commitment to exacerbating and deepening what would seem to be poetry’s constraints, to the point of negating the writer’s subjectivity. The matrix understood in this Mallarméan sense is precisely the concept that allows us to think the connection in Cubism between, on the one hand, the “hope of an anonymous art,” and, on the other hand, imputation of “purity” to the most denatured form of color, mass produced and arbitrary. It also accounts precisely for Picasso’s use of the newspaper sheet as a limited field from which a multiplicity of

Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 24; Adorno, “Letters to Walter Benjamin,” p. 122.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

aesthetic possibilities could be cut and unfolded. The task ahead will be to demonstrate that Mallarmé's critique of journalism and, more importantly, the Cubist appropriation of the newspaper, articulates a dialectical model of autonomy as anonymity.

Industrial Language: Autonomy and Heteronomy

The relation between Mallarmé's critique of the popular press of his day and Picasso and Braque's decision to incorporate the fragments of the daily news into their works has been framed as one of simple opposition, with the cubist newspaper striking a blow against the refined language of Mallarmé, that most hermetic nineteenth-century "Symbolist," and his putative political disengagement.¹³⁹ This reading of Mallarmé, which has taken root almost exclusively in Anglophone art history, bolsters the radicality of Picasso and Braque's importation of industrially produced materials at the cost of falsifying Mallarmé's quite complex views on journalism, to say nothing of the dialectical relationship he proposed between the work of art and the social world.

Mallarmé's concept of language operating anonymously, as though by itself, thwarting the author's imperious desire to impose their personality upon the word, found its counterpoint in the transparent form of communication sought by journalism. In the newspapers, he wrote, language is reduced to its "denominative and representative function," in which the word is used instrumentally as a means of exchange:

To tell, to teach, and even to describe have their place, and suffice, perhaps, in order to exchange human thought, to take or to put into someone else's hand in silence a coin, this elementary use of discourse serving the universal *reporting* in which, except for literature, all genres of contemporary writing participate (D 210).

¹³⁹ See note 14 above.

In its reigning social use, Mallarmé contended, language operated according to a transactional model, in which words functioned like coins, passed from an agent to a recipient in order to produce a desired effect. For Mallarmé, this use of language was the natural complement to an ascendant capitalist political economy, which had the result of “forcing [the poet] to recognize thinking, the essence, by the residue, coins—everyone, after that, will operate without shame, under the law of a private signature” (D 278). In the face of this dominant pecuniary treatment of linguistic communication, which “reduces to the level of business, a situation expressly prepared to cast everything into play” (D 278) the poet had no choice but to go “on strike before society” (OCII 700).

The task of the newspapers was to provide “precisely what a modern person requires: to be reflected even in his averageness—served by his obsequious phantom woven out of everyday language” (D 222). Mallarmé described the effect of self-recognition sought by the press, in which the public would encounter itself in the pages of the newspaper, as in a kind of mirror, not as a fully-fledged democratic subject (in the mode of the literate proletarian pictured in Lissitzky’s *Pressa mural*), but as a kind of neutral banality: “These bores..., through the fact of loosened pages, penetrate everywhere, come out, insinuate themselves; *and we understand that they’re us*” (D 222). As Mallarmé described it, the nineteenth-century newspaper promised instantaneous reflection of the historical present, pure contemporaneity, and a sociological registration of the statistically average citizen, a form of communication “into which fictive contemporaries rush,” lulled by the “false appearance of a present” (D 222, 140). Yet the self-recognition promised by the newspaper, Mallarmé countered, was in no way self-determined but managed from above by capital: “A type of business, that of numbers, the

summary of enormous and elementary interests, employs the printing press for the propagation of opinions, the narration of miscellaneous news stories” (D 223). The newspaper had, thereby, achieved, according to Mallarmé, a form of language in which the word itself was “assimilated to disappointed bankers... subject to declines and to reversals in the stock exchange” (D 220).

And yet, for all that, Mallarmé’s critique of the commodification of the word must be rigorously distinguished from the conservative or elitist nineteenth-century reaction to the press.¹⁴⁰ As a proponent of this latter position one might nominate the mid-nineteenth-century historian, writer, and critic Sainte-Beuve and his anathema against “la littérature industrielle.”¹⁴¹ For Sainte-Beuve, the explosion of the popular press and the serial novel had subjected literature to new material constraints, such as the monotony of the column, the parceling out of literary space, and the idea that authors would be paid by the line. Saint-Beuve argued that these conditions were no mere external factors, but had wormed their way into the very substance of literature, encouraging writers to prioritize dialogue—the shorter the better (ideally one word per line)—in order to maximize space and economize time, literally conceiving writing as the disposition of units (words) in such a way as to maximize monetary yield.

At the root of Sainte-Beuve’s objections, however, was an opposition to the perceived negative effects of “the invasion of literary democracy, as with the advent of

¹⁴⁰ This task has been greatly advanced by recent work by Linda Goddard, Anna Sigrídur Arnar and Damian Catani. Catani, *The Poet in Society: Art, Consumerism, and Politics in Mallarmé*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003. Thank you to Emily Apter for bringing Catani’s book to my attention.

¹⁴¹ Sainte-Beuve, “*De la Littérature industrielle*,” *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 1 Septembre 1839. Reprinted in Lise Dumasy, ed. *La querelle du roman-feuilleton: littérature, presse et politique, un débat précurseur (1836-1848)*, Grenoble : ELLUG-Université Stendhal, 1999, pp. 25-43.

all other democracies.”¹⁴² Sainte-Beuve imagined a proto-Warholian scenario in which the industrial spread of the newspapers’ “literary democracy” would abolish the privileged social identity of the writer and found a world where everyone considered themselves to be an artist: “With our electoral practices, them too industrial, every person, at least once in their life, will have had their own page, their own discourse, their own handbill, their own *toast*, will be an author. Between this and typing up a serial there is only a short step. Each person asks, ‘Why not me too?’”¹⁴³ In other words, the very features of the press that authors like Sainte-Beuve deplored for collapsing industrial and literary production were those that gave the newspaper its potency for later avant-gardes, from the development of collage as a form of immanent media criticism to the factographic appropriation of the advanced techniques of industry in order to instantiate the simultaneity of production and reception.¹⁴⁴

Mallarmé, likewise, perceived redemptive potential in the newspaper, precisely at the level of its material presentation of language. In a lecture at Oxford in 1895, Mallarmé described contemporary French developments in prose writing and in “free verse” poetry, and then presented what must have seemed to his British audience an extremely paradoxical assertion: “I don’t know any other use of language that even remotely resembles these two [prose and free verse]: except the poster and advertisement,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* For a brief but excellent overview of the condition of (and the phobic reaction to) “literary overproduction” focused on Balzac (and Sainte-Beuve), see Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, “1843, 9 June: Publishing Novels,” in *A New History of French Literature*, Ed. Denis Hollier, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 693-697.

¹⁴⁴ Devin Fore writes, “Ever since Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve published an article on the newspaper in 1839 entitled ‘De la littérature industrielle,’ critics had been observing that journalism and mechanical technologies had many features in common: their rigorous subordination of individual style to highly schematized, prefabricated formats; their collectivized and anonymous methods of automated manufacture; the periodicity and utility of their product; and their orientation toward channels of mass distribution.” Fore, “The Operative Word in Soviet Factography,” *October* N. 118 (Fall 2006): p. 119.

which has taken over the newspapers—it has often made me fantasize as if before a new language [about] the originality of the Press.”

The articles known as *premier-Paris*, admirable and the sole contemporary form, because they belong to all eternity, are really poems, simply more or less good: rich, void, enameled, or glued together./ People have made the critical mistake, in my opinion, in editorial rooms, of seeing them as a separate genre. (D 196)

In the face of the “extraordinary overproduction” of newspapers and the expansion of circulation between the 1830s and 1880s—which, by some accounts grew by 4000% in this period—Mallarmé proposed a new social role for poetry (D 224).¹⁴⁵ Editorial rooms, he argued, should classify advertisements and the “premier-Paris” (news briefs or *faits-divers*) alongside poetry. The mass distribution apparatus of the press, Mallarmé continued, possessed extraordinary potential, promising “the founding of the modern popular Poem, or at least some innumerable *Thousand and One Nights*; at which a suddenly invented reading majority would marvel. Come participate in whatever happens in this thunderous accomplishment, as in a festival, all you contemporaries!” (D 224).

Although the term “contemporary” was always imbued with skepticism for Mallarmé, he nevertheless hoped that the medium of the newspaper could be appropriated by the (future) poet, who, “faced with currency, persists as the flower of human presentness” (D 227-228). Indeed, from Mallarmé’s activities in the 1870s as the founder, publisher, and sole author of a women’s fashion magazine, *La Dernière Mode*, which he wrote in his typically hermetic prose through a number of female pseudonyms,

¹⁴⁵ See Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 118.

and which was known in Picasso's circle¹⁴⁶, to his unrealized plans for a chance-based poetic ceremony that would express "the unconscious heart of the crowd," Mallarmé sought, like no poet of his generation, a means to bridge the gap between the experiments of the socially isolated poet and the "participation of a hitherto ignored people in the political life of France... that will honor the whole of the close of the nineteenth century."¹⁴⁷

Mallarmé's death in 1898 came on the heels of his most intensive effort to combine poetic inscrutability with the form of newspaper language in *Un Coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard* (Figure 2.22). In this poem, Mallarmé deployed words across the pages in dynamic spatial arrangements that mimed the form of newspaper headlines yet undermined their purpose, with varying typographical sizes and emphases indicating multiple and intertwining lines of text. This "spatialization of reading," Mallarmé wrote, in which "the paper intervenes each time an image of its own," "may trouble the novice who must apply his gaze to the first words of the Poem, so that those that follow, disposed as they are on the Page, lead to the final ones" (OCI 391).

On the one hand, then, in *Un Coup de Dés*, poetry's semantic function seems to expand to encompass every material determination of language, from the structure of sound relationships to the visual contrast of text on paper, from the activation of the trench between adjacent pages to the total architecture of the book. But on the other, the poem is haunted by the threat of unmeaning, as its fractured syntax inserts a moment of

¹⁴⁶ *La Dernière Mode* will be discussed further in Chapter Four. Max Jacob wrote to Picasso on April 7, 1917, "Cocteau published a poem in [the fashion magazine] *Femina*. Mallarmé did it before him." Cited in Hélène Seckel, *Max Jacob et Picasso*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, p. 145.

¹⁴⁷ This ceremony, known as *Le Livre*, will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. Mallarmé, "The Impressionists and Édouard Manet," in *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874–1886*, San Francisco, CA: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, p. 33.

hesitation and doubt in the process of reading, not only about the specific sense of a motif or of a given line, but about whether the poem's words possess any meaning whatsoever.¹⁴⁸ If the newspaper reconciled language “under the law of a private signature,” (D 278) in order to construct the illusion of direct communication between two fully-fledged subjects, Mallarmé's final poem adopted the form of the advertisement or headline to produce words “hovering on the brink of the void,” alternating ceaselessly between semantic multiplicity and sonorous emptiness (OCI 376-77).

A decade prior to the “work of art” essay, in *One-Way Street* (written between 1923-26), Benjamin wrote, “Mallarmé, who in the crystalline structure of his manifestly traditionalist writing saw the true image of what was to come, was in the *Coup de dés* the first to incorporate the graphic tensions of the advertisement in the printed page.”¹⁴⁹

Advancing the sort of “dialectical” reading of Mallarmé that Adorno missed from his later text, Benjamin proposed that Mallarmé's “constructive principles,” his devotion to the strictures of verse, converged with the constraints put on aesthetics by capitalist political economy.¹⁵⁰ In this way, Benjamin argued,

[The Dadaists] show the contemporary relevance of what Mallarmé, monadically, in his hermetic room, had discovered through a pre-established harmony with all the decisive events of our times in economics, technology and public life. Script—having found, in the book,

¹⁴⁸ As Jacques Derrida put it in his critique of Jean-Pierre Richard's *L'univers imaginaire de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1962), in reading Mallarmé's poems as richly saturated with polyvalent meaning, ‘what one tends not to see... is that these textual effects are rich with a kind of poverty... One does not see this because one thinks one is seeing themes in the very spot where the nontheme, that which cannot become a theme, the very thing that has no meaning, is ceaselessly re-marking itself—that is, disappearing.’ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, 251. More recently, the role of hesitation in *Un Coup de Dés* is treated at length by Quentin Meillassoux, for whom it operates in both in the uncertainty as to whether the Master has cast the titular dice and in the ‘infinite hesitation’ produced by the uncertainty as to whether the poem is written in free verse or according to a coded poetic meter. See Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, 134–149.

¹⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Attested Auditor of Books,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and other writings on media*, p. 171.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence—is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. This is the hard schooling of its new form.¹⁵¹

Benjamin acutely identifies a dialectic in which the poet’s “monadic” withdrawal into the problems of poetic structure, his commitment to the most traditional constraints of his medium (especially the strictures of rhyme and the codified meter of the Alexandrine or sonnet) paradoxically led him to mirror in a “pre-established harmony” the subjection of the word to the “heteronomic” conditions imposed by the market.

Mallarmé’s affirmation that “decidedly no one consciously escapes journalism” (D 8) has too often been read, like his proclamation of the impossibility of abolishing chance, as a melancholic admission of failure, rather than a forthright expression of the reality principle. Adorno (in his letters about the “work of art” essay) and Benjamin (here, in “One Way Street”) both proposed that Mallarmé’s strict devotion to the objectification of language dialectically mirrored the reification of language at large, and that in so doing it attained a historical truth-value. The “hard schooling” of his poetry demonstrated the “harmony” of the most “withdrawn,” self-reflexive, and hermetic writing with the “heteronomies” of totally commercialized language. For Mallarmé, nevertheless, “[Poetry] will always remain excluded, and the quiver of its wings elsewhere than on the page is parodied, not more, by the breadth, in our hands, of the hasty and vast pages of the newspaper.” (D 224) What, then, was the core of his critique of the newspaper, where can we locate the difference between the poem and the advertisement in the age of their seeming inextricability?

¹⁵¹ Benjamin notes that the work of the Dadaists stemmed from “the precise nervous reactions of these literati, and were therefore far less enduring than Mallarmé’s, which grew out of the inner nature of his style.” *Ibid.*, p. 171.

In his famous essay on reification from *History and Class Consciousness* (written between 1919 and 1923), Georg Lukács argued that journalism epitomized the effects on consciousness of capitalist rationalization. For Lukács, capitalism had progressed to a state in which the “commodity [had become] the universal category of society as a whole.”¹⁵² In such a society, Lukács argued, the phenomenon of alienation as Marx described it was no longer to be understood as the exclusive precinct of the working classes, who experienced it directly in the violence of surplus value extraction. For Lukács, “problems of consciousness arising from wage-labour were repeated in the ruling class in a refined and spiritualised, but, for that very reason, more intensified form.”¹⁵³ The alienation of the worker’s labor-power from his or her personality in the process of commodity production, Lukács argued, was evident too in the bureaucrat, manager, or even “creative worker.” Just as industrial factory labor parceled up lived time into exchangeable units, “intellectual laborers” voluntarily quantified and objectified their consciousness, creativity, and even moral faculties, viewing these faculties as separable from their total personality and for sale on the market.¹⁵⁴ “This phenomenon,” Lukács proposed, “can be seen at its most grotesque in journalism”:

Here it is precisely subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament and powers of expression that are reduced to an abstract mechanism functioning autonomously and divorced both from the personality of their ‘owner’ and from the material and concrete nature of the subject matter in hand. The journalist’s ‘lack of convictions,’ the prostitution of his

¹⁵² Georg Lukács, *History and class consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971, p. 86

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 100

¹⁵⁴ “The specialized ‘virtuoso,’ the vendor of his objectified and reified faculties does not just become the [passive] observer of society; he also lapses into a contemplative attitude vis-à-vis the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties...” *Ibid.*, p. 100.

experiences and beliefs is comprehensible only as the apogee of capitalist reification.¹⁵⁵

For the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, the reification of language and human communication in journalism epitomized “this rationalization of the world [which] appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate to the very depths of man’s physical and psychic nature.”¹⁵⁶ And the psychic effect of reification, for Lukács, was above all to be described as a process of *depersonalization*, a socially enforced destruction of subjectivity in the process of becoming anonymous. As Lukács described it, “The split between the worker’s labour-power and his personality, its metamorphosis into a thing, an object that he sells on the market is repeated here too [in bourgeois consciousness]. But with the difference that not every mental faculty is suppressed by mechanisation; only one faculty (or complex of faculties) is detached from the whole personality and placed in opposition to it, becoming a thing, a commodity.”¹⁵⁷

Against the journalistic reification of language, encountering the balanced sonorous ambiguities in a sonnet by Mallarmé, the reader may suspect, first, that the author has excused himself from the responsibility of authorizing any one meaning over another, and, second, that the poem’s crystalline internal structure is indifferent to interpretation as such, and therefore does not demand a reader. In these moments of “vibratory suspense” [*suspens vibratoire*] as Mallarmé put it, language oscillated between its mute opacity and its signifying virtuality (D 235). If Mallarmé invited the reader to become aware of the flickering identity of *naître* (to be born) and *n’être* (to not be)—or

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 99

of *Maître* (master) and *Mètre* (poetic meter)—it was only secondarily, he claimed, to convey images of mastery or birth, and primarily to render to language its innate “contingency” and “mobility.” To readers frustrated by the impression that words have simply ceased to function *for them*, Mallarmé retorted with disarming simplicity: “It’s just Language, playing” (D 235).

Admitting Hesitation

As early as 1914, the Russian modernist critic Yakov Tugendhold linked Picasso’s cubism to Mallarmé’s desire to activate a play principle within language at its most impersonal. In a review of Picasso’s work, he wrote,

[Picasso’s] pieces of wood and marble, plaster and newspaper (I have seen pictures in his studio with bits of newspaper stuck to them) are there for the sake of contrast. The irruption of a coarse material world is intended, by its piquancy, to enhance the supramaterial quality of the remainder of the picture. In the same way Mallarmé sometimes used “everyday words, the kind that honest bourgeois read in their *Petit Journal*,” but he did so in such a way that they resembled charades.¹⁵⁸

This anecdote about Mallarmé and the bourgeois newspaper, which was cited in the 1920s by Roman Jakobson and René Ghil, among others, points to the proposition shared by Mallarmé’s self-reflexive language and Picasso’s material heterogeneity.¹⁵⁹ Both subtract—literally and figuratively—fragments from the most generic and unexceptional

¹⁵⁸ Yakov Tugendhold, “French Pictures in the Shchukin collection,” *Apollon*, No. 1, 1914, 33-6; in McCully, *A Picasso Anthology*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁹ Tugendhold’s anecdote seems to have spread in Russian Futurist circles, as Roman Jakobson also cited it in “New Russian Poetry” from 1921. See, Jakobson, “Fragments de ‘la nouvelle poésie russe,’” *Huit Questions de poétique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977, p. 21. Its source was likely the poet René Ghil, who recalled in his memoirs published in 1923 the many evenings spent in Mallarmé’s company. In his extraordinary account of Mallarmé’s work, Ghil described the “Maître” criticizing his search for extraordinary “mots savants.” Mallarmé told him, on the contrary, “We should use everyday words, the ones that everyone thinks that they understand! I only use these. These are the same words that the Bourgeois reads every morning, the same! But... if it happens that he finds these same words in one of my poems, he won’t understand! It’s because they have been re-written by a poet.” René Ghil, *Les dates et les Oeuvres: Symbolisme et Poésie Scientifique*, Paris: G Crès et cie, 1923, p. 214-15.

social site of communication, the newspaper, in order to subject them to a process of destabilization—to insert, as Kahnweiler had it, a delay in the process of meaning extraction. Indeed, the critical difference for Mallarmé between poetry and the language of the newspaper was that the poet’s “labour cannot be paid by the product, because, perhaps, it admits hesitation” (D 277-78). Mallarmé’s project to construct an anonymous and impersonal use of language was driven by a desire to hold open the gap between the materiality of the word and its meaning, in order to produce a momentary experience of uncertainty or incomprehension. It was in these moments of indecision, which the newspaper (and Kahnweiler, as demonstrated in Chapter One) sought to minimize, that the reader could face the contingency and impersonality of language, the negativity that made poetry possible.

If, following the establishment of a commercial code in 1836, the space of the newspaper was strictly partitioned into degrees of salability—with editorials on the first page, paid *faits divers* ambiguously situated between commercial and journalistic intent on page 2, expensive advertisements known as *réclames* on page 3, and the cheap *annonces* on page 4—Picasso’s scissors traversed these distinctions with seeming impunity.¹⁶⁰ Combining fragments from news briefs, illustrations, “advertorials” and serial fiction, Picasso’s *papiers collés* scrambled the symbolic order—and the economic hierarchy—that structured the space of the newspaper, radically neutralizing qualitative differences in commercial intent, tone, subject matter, and graphic impact, to say nothing of the very distinction between word and image. Picasso’s selection of newspaper

¹⁶⁰ For an account of the role of capital in the development of the newspaper, and the regimentation of commercial and journalistic space, see Theodore Zeldin, “Newspapers and Corruption,” in *France, 1848-1945, Volume II: Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 511-525. See also Terdiman’s analysis in *Discourse/Counter-discourse*, pp. 123-124.

fragments, this essay has suggested, was not underpinned by a search for rich signification, but rather by a principle of indifference that depended upon—and demonstrated—the mutual exchangeability of any given element taken from the newspapers and their condition of generalized banality.

In the *papiers collés*, Picasso radicalized the aesthetic of ambiguity at the heart of cubism: no longer limited to the undecidability between particular interpretations (between guitar and bottle, for example), they produce a vacillation between the viewer's desire to find meaning in the newsprint and the fact of its opaque impersonality. Within the cubist newspaper, a multitude of fragmentary voices speak, none of which can definitively be considered as authorized by the artist. Revoking the solid ground of the artist's personality, Picasso's *papiers collés* open a space for the experience of chance, contingency, and play from within everyday communication. In this way, they demonstrate their profound affinity with—one is tempted to say realization of—Mallarmé's dream that the writer would "cede the initiative to words, through the clash of their mobilized inequalities," at the cost of becoming anonymous (D 208).

Mallarmé's enemy, therefore, was also Picasso's: not the newspaper as such, but the reification of language, the destruction of its mobile duality for the sake of facilitating communicative exchange. That Picasso transposed the utopian anonymous language sought by Mallarmé to its historically specific social form in the generic speech of journalism and advertisement is one of the most dramatic historical inversions in twentieth-century art. By subtracting the newspaper once more from its social function, by subjecting it to a second degree of depersonalization, Picasso made communication in

its most instrumental form the stage for a “collective adventure” in our ever-renewed wager on the possibility of producing meaning together.

If we still must ask “who is speaking,” in Picasso’s *papiers collés*, I suggest that we turn to the words isolated from the newspaper as though in a comic speech bubble in the Museum of Modern Art’s *Head of a Man*, 1913 (Figure 2.23): “*Je suis.*” It’s just language playing, as though all by itself. In fact, were we willing look closer, we would see that Picasso’s pencil cuts across newsprint lines to surround the words “*Je suis/général.*” (Figure 2.24) I am general, anonymous, empty, and impersonal. But, then again, we may find meaning where we want it in the papers.

Chapter Three

Simultaneity and Totality: Tzara's Scores and Mallarmé's *Livre*

This chapter marks a hinge point in the dissertation away from the Paris of the cubists and from recognizably art historical terrain. Its two primary objects of inquiry will be, first, manuscript scores for two “simultaneous poems” conceived, executed and performed by the founder of Dada, Tristan Tzara, and a host of collaborators in Zurich between 1916 and 1919, and, second, a sprawling manuscript by Mallarmé consisting of notes for a utopian poetic ritual meticulously planned to give itself over to chance, known as *Le Livre*, written in the 1890s and only published in 1957.

I will focus first on the two scores for “simultaneous poems” housed in Tzara's archive at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, which were never published in his lifetime and have received no scholarly attention to date. My initial goal will be to introduce and reconstruct the scores themselves, to decipher as much as possible their rather hermetic mode of notation, and to describe their performative realizations for (or against) an unsuspecting *Zurichoise* audience. Conceived for as many as twenty performers, each bellowing different parts at the same time, the simultaneous poems were Dada's first and most ambitious attempt to imagine a new public role for their attacks on the borders of music, dance, and poetry. As Richard Huelsenbeck recalled, “We came out on stage, bowed like a yodeling band about to celebrate lakes and forests in song, pulled out our ‘scores,’ and, throwing all restraint to the wind, each of us shouted his text at the bewildered spectators.”¹ The analysis of both the performances and their mode of scoring will require setting the Dada score in relation to contemporary innovations in

¹ Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, New York: Viking Press, 1974, p. 23.

choreographic notation being developed at the Zurich School for Dance run by Rudolf Laban. Several key Laban dancers including Maya Chrusecz, Suzanne Perrotet, Sophie Taeuber, and Käthe Wulff, were not only performers in Tzara's "simultaneous poems" but were, I will demonstrate, engaged in a parallel project to construct a graphic notation for the near infinity of corporeal motion, just as Tzara had hoped to do with the elements of language. The epistemological transformation of the score that occurred in Zurich, I will demonstrate, opened the previously unidirectional or hierarchical relations between the composer, the performer and the sound, to a profound indeterminacy.

Throughout his life Tzara explicitly avowed the central yet fraught significance of Mallarmé's work for Dada more broadly and for the simultaneous poem more precisely. Yet despite the concrete fact of their historical and aesthetic entwinement, outside of Mallarmé's family and until its posthumous publication, no one, and certainly not Tzara, would have been familiar with the concrete details of the *Livre*, which its author had ordered destroyed from his death bed, convinced that "there's no literary heritage there."² What remains of this project are two hundred torn scraps of paper, notes on envelopes, enigmatic sketches, endless and maddening calculations, scenographic or choreographic proposals, poetic fragments, and hermetic diagrams—all presented on equal footing in a state of generalized and impenetrable complexity. Yet these notes represent Mallarmé's private attempt to work through the details of his public meditations on the status of the book, the relation between music, dance and poetry, and the relationship between the advanced work of art and the "crowd," which were explored in his widely read "critical

² Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 642. Two years earlier, in August 1896, Mallarmé had written to Valéry that "I have armoires full of manuscripts: all of that will be burned!" Charles Morice even wrote to Geneviève Mallarmé in October 1898 to ask "Mademoiselle, could I ask you for a bit of these ashes, so that they may be preserved forever?" Both letters are cited in Eric Benoit, *Mallarmé et le Mystère du "Livre,"* Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998, p. 11.

poems,” published in various journals and collected in *Divagations* (1897). Despite their quite literally marginal status, the notes for *Le Livre* are crucial to the Mallarméan enterprise, and will serve in this chapter as a means to clarify the nature of the historical inversion that operated between this nineteenth-century aesthetic utopia and Dada on a number of pressing issues, including the notion of the poem as a score, the renovation of the status of interpretation, and the newly uncertain identity of the public addressed by the work.

As precarious as Tzara’s scores or Mallarmé’s notes are as objects, and as uncertain as we must remain with respect to their very *publicity*, both represent successive moments in what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls the “deconstruction of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”³ Seeking, in his *Livre*, to describe the sublation of poetry in a “minor and disseminated” public ritual, stripped of all claims to transcendence, Mallarmé recognized his primary opponent in the aesthetic and social legacy of Richard Wagner’s “total work of art,” which was gaining traction in France in the 1880s and 90s. This chapter will analyze the terms of Mallarmé’s critique of Wagner, which centered on the role of the artist in the *demos*, on the relationship of myth and mimesis, and on the sought-for reconciliation of the artistic genres. For Tzara and his close collaborator and fellow founder of Dada, Hugo Ball, the model of Wagner was likewise at issue, standing for the variety of musico-poetic hybrids against which the simultaneous poem had to differentiate itself. This chapter therefore analyzes successive debates, from Mallarmé to Dada, from Wagner to Laban, on the means to reorganize—or to disorganize—the tissue of relationships obtaining between artistic genres, between composer and performer,

³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, Trans. Felicia McCarren. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 63.

between artist and collectivity. In Tzara's simultaneous poems, the relationship between the arts and their relationship to the social body itself is encountered not as unification, synthesis or totalization, but as mutual interruption, drowning out, cancellation, and fragmentation.

Two Dada Scores: *Froid Lumière* and *La Fièvre du Mâle*

To introduce Tzara's simultaneous poems, I'll begin on familiar ground, with the only score to be published in his lifetime: *L'amiral cherche une maison à louer*, written collaboratively by Tzara with Huelsenbeck and Marcel Janco, performed on March 30th, 1916, and published just a few months later in the first issue of the journal *Cabaret Voltaire*, edited by Hugo Ball (Figure 3.1).⁴ The score is divided into three parts, a German part for Huelsenbeck telling of an admiral unsuccessfully apartment-hunting after being kicked out of his flat, a French prose poem by Tzara recounted similar housing issues but also "archangels shitting and birds falling," and a medley of three American music hall songs sung by Janco, appropriated from "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm" (1913), "I Love the Ladies" (1914), and "Everybody's Doing it Now" (1911).⁵ Halfway through, there is a "rhythmic intermission" with Huelsenbeck shouting percussive verbal exclamations and banging a bass drum, Tzara proclaiming "*rouge bleu*" repeatedly in crescendo while shaking a rattle, and Janco blowing a whistle from *piano* to

⁴ Tristan Tzara "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer," *Cabaret Voltaire*, N. 1 (1916): pp. 6-7. TOCI 492-493.

⁵ "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm" was written by A. Seymour Brown and adapted from a children's novel of the same name by Kate Douglas Wiggin about a young girl living with her aunts in Maine. "I Love the Ladies" was a duet written by Grant Clarke in 1914. "Everybody's Doing it Now," was a ragtime hit by Irving Berlin from 1911.

fortississimo. Finally, the three speakers end in unison by proclaiming the futility of it all:

“L’amiral n’a rien trouvé.”

It is clear that Tzara intended the poem to inaugurate a major tactic for Dada, naming it “the first theatrical realization of this modern aesthetic” in the explanatory “Note pour les bourgeois” that accompanied the score as published in Ball’s journal. Tzara’s desire to situate the score at the center of Dada is also exemplified by the note’s catalogue of legitimizing references, from the cubists’ “transmutation of objects” to Mallarmé’s “typographic reform,” from the “schematic simultaneism” of Villiers de l’Isle Adam to the “visual poem” of Apollinaire.⁶ While the “note for the bourgeois” has been regularly cited by art and literary historians—perhaps scholars were the anticipated target of its canny title—this first “simultaneous poem” has tended to be treated as a unicum, a kind of one-off. It is indeed exceptional for its inaugural status, its publication in a typographic format, and the exemplary scholarship since devoted to it, by TJ Demos and Leah Dickerman in particular.⁷ However, Tzara went on to develop the simultaneous poem in several more scores and numerous performances, in which the division between discrete works and different realizations of the same “piece” are blurred.

Housed in the Fonds Tzara at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet are ten manuscript sheets, in varying condition and states of legibility, that together make up three scores followed in performances of Dada simultaneous poems. In addition to an early draft of *L’amiral cherche une maison à louer* on two ripped and folded pages and filed in Tzara’s correspondence with Huelsenbeck (divided into three parts for H., Tz.,

⁶ Tristan Tzara “L’amiral cherche une maison à louer,” pp. 6-7.

⁷ See TJ Demos, “Circulations in and around Zurich Dada,” *October* 105 (Summer 2003), pp. 147-158, and Demos, “Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile,” *The Dada Seminars*, Ed. Leah Dickerman. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005, pp. 7-29.

and J, in English, French, and German but sharing no text in common with the published version)⁸, there are two additional manuscript scores for simultaneous poems that did not receive typographical treatment and were only published in part with Tzara’s collected works in the mid-1970s.⁹ The first comprises two sheets, titled *Froid [sic] Lumière: poème simultané par Tr. Tzara*, written out in purple ink on graph paper for six performers, whose parts are laid out in rows as in an orchestral score (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3).¹⁰ The second, an untitled, sprawling and uncertain affair, is made up of six sheets, each given an alphanumeric label: A4, A6, C2, C3, C4, and C6.¹¹ This chapter will focus on these two precarious scores—suspended between preparatory documents and relics from ephemeral performance, of confounding complexity yet laying no claim to permanence—as a means to illuminate the rather amorphous category of “simultaneous poetry,” and its place in Dada.

As the second score is by far the more complicated, I’ll begin with the two manuscript sheets entitled *Froid Lumière*. Neatly titled, the pages lay out six parts in rows, each bearing the name of the performer, and bound together with a square bracket. Some names are familiar in the annals of Zurich Dada, while others are relatively unknown: [Friedrich] Glauser, [Käthe] Wulff, [Marcel] Janco, Maya [Chrusecz], [Emmy] Hennings, and Tzara. A red pencil line separates Hennings’ part from Tzara’s at bottom,

⁸ TZR C 2036, Fonds Tzara, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Université de Paris. [Henceforth, I will refer to the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet as the BLJD]

⁹ The two manuscript simultaneous poems held at the BLJD have been reproduced only three times, never in full, and without commentary in TOC IV, Tzara, *Poésies Complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar, Paris: Flammarion, 2011; and Raoul Schrott, *Dada 15/25: Dokumentation und chronologischer überblick zu Tzara & Co.*, Köln: DuMont, 2004, pp. 212-13

¹⁰ Tristan Tzara, “Froid Lumière,” TZR 753 in the Fonds Tristan Tzara, BLJD.

¹¹ Tzara, “*Fiacre fiévreux et craquement acres*,” TZR 754 in the Fonds Tzara, BLJD.

indicating, perhaps, that the Doucet score was Tzara's own copy for the work's performance, which took place on April 28th, 1917, at the Galerie Dada's *Abend neuer Kunst*.¹²

Before turning to the performance, it will be necessary to be attentive to the score itself—especially since, as we will see, the path from score to realization is far from straightforward. The score operates diagrammatically—in the broadest sense of a non-mimetic schematization of information—and structures each performer's parts against the others according to an implicit and regular vertical axis of simultaneity.¹³ Ordered in this way, each sound uttered by a performer—a word, part of a word, a noise—is visually matched with a corresponding sound from another performer, suggesting the progression of each part along the horizontal temporal axis. These two axes establish only a minimal structure to ensure unison and to control individual reading speed and rhythm, as each performer would attempt to time their assigned phonetic fragments with those of other performers along the vertical axis.

For example, if read in isolation, Glauser's part includes nonsense passages in French, progressively breaking down into phonetic outbursts and echoes: "*Seigneur je suis la joie / joie + bon jour / rrrrr oui oui / cri cri / iiiiiiiiii.*" Read "simultaneously" as a score, however, the opening two beats of the performance would require Glauser's

¹² Tzara referenced "froid Lumière, poème simultané par 7 personnes" on the *Soirée d'art nouveau* in his "Chronique zurichoise, 1915-1919" TOCI 564. The "Chronique zurichoise" was first published in Richard Huelsenbeck, *Dada Almanach*, Berlin: E Reiss, 1920, pp. 10-28.

¹³ While scores are all diagrams, in the most capacious sense of the term, the simultaneous poems are intimately related to a broader epistemic challenge to the status of the diagrammatic in Dada (which cannot occupy us at length in this chapter.) David Joselit's description of Picabia's mechanomorphic drawings could apply to Tzara's scores, were one to substitute the focus on visual representation after cubism for that of poetic language: "The diagram reconnects the disconnected fragments of representation invented by cubism. This act of reconnection does not function as a return to coherence, but rather as a free play of polymorphous linkages, which, to this day, remain a central motif of modern (and postmodern) art." David Joselit, "Dada Diagrams," in *The Dada Seminars*, Eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew Witkovsky, Washington D.C.: Center for the Advanced Study of the Visual Arts, 2005, p. 232.

“Sei/gneur” to be proclaimed in unison with Wulff’s “oi/ou,” Janco’s “mu/sique,”¹⁴ Chrusecz’s staccato “i/i,” etc.—sounding together as massed linguistic chords.

Yet, deprived of the entire system of sonic order developed in musical staff notation, especially the tempo and time signature allowing the division of sound into regular groupings of beats, the “simultaneity” of the performers’ parts would necessarily have been ad hoc, contingent, and flexible. The horizontal axis, broken vertically into sought-for moments of unison represents, then, neither the cyclical rhythm of metered time, nor the more variable yet still-highly-coded rhythmic system of poetic recitation. It is neither the dynamic and fully elastic duration of lived time—the sort of temporal orientation sought decades later in Fluxus task-based scores—nor the regimentation of clock time. Instead, Tzara’s score specifies a time for the performers structured primarily by responsive listening and reaction. Imagining the variety of possibilities for interpreting the score suggests that the simultaneous poem performance would have been subject to acceleration, asynchrony, interruption, hesitation, idiosyncratic reading, and the threat of total breakdown.

The pervasive presence of notational ambiguities is clearly evinced in the second line of parts, where Glauser has a punctual “*cri cri*” (scream in French) followed by silence, Wulff and Janco’s parts read “*glisse glisse glisse*”—once for Janco and twice for Wulff, whose part is supplemented with a small “(*cresc*)”—and Maya Chrusecz’s instructions read “*schreien*-----|.” In addition to the flexibility of duration and rhythm, these parts each exploit an ambiguity between language’s notational, semantic, and sonorous functions. Chrusecz’s part presumably instructs her to scream and sustain for

¹⁴ In Raoul Schrott’s transcription and translation, he renders Janco’s part in German as “*ein/zige*,” which would have the French read “*uuu / nique*.” To my eyes, comparing with Tzara’s handwriting more generally, it is more likely that Janco’s opening word was “*mu/sique*.” Schrott, *Dada 15/25*, p. 101.

some time, rather than simply speak the German word “*schreien*.” This, however, is not a general principle, as the instructions that read “*glisse*” repeatedly could imply either the pronouncement of the French word for “slide” or the abbreviation for *glissando* (designating a slide through consecutive tones).¹⁵ One could imagine the performance both ways: a hissing chorus of “*glisse glisse glisse*” in crescendo, or cascading vocal glissandi. The passages of “*cri cri cri*”—a recurring motif in Tzara’s simultaneous poems—seem, for their part, to have indicated the onomatopoeic word, rather than the scream itself, as we can intuit from the descriptions given by Germaine Everling of Tzara’s simultaneous poems given later in Paris.¹⁶

A programme for the *Abend neuer Kunst*, held on April 28, 1917, advertises “‘*Froid Lumière*,’ poème simultané lu par 7 personnes,” (one person seems to have dropped out between the printing of the handbills and the writing of the scores, which are for 6 performers) (Figure 3.4). The performance was slated to occur in the middle of the evening, which included “artistic entertainments” from the other performers listed on the score: Janco delivered a speech entitled “*Über Cubismus und eigene Bilder*,” Glauser read poetry and Léon Bloy’s broadside “*Exégèse des lieux-communs*,”¹⁷ and Emmy Hennings read poems, including one entitled “*Kritik der Leiche*.” Tzara cannily scheduled an intermission between *Froid Lumière* and the third and final “act” of the

¹⁵ After all, piano works by the French master of the modern *glissando*, Claude Debussy, had been performed at the Cabaret Voltaire during its first year, by none other than Hugo Ball.

¹⁶ Germaine Everling Picabia describes a related performance, discussed in greater detail below, as “a sort of symphony on a rising scale, where the only words were: *cra... cra... cra...* It would start off again on the third with *Cri... cri... cri...*” Germaine Everling Picabia, “C’était hier: Dada...” *Oeuvres libres*, n. 109 (June 1955): p. 146

¹⁷ Glauser was not alone in his interest in Léon Bloy. Bloy fascinated Ball and was apparently the subject of conversation in the Dadaist’s first meeting with Carl Schmitt, the jurist and political philosopher, in Munich 1919. See André Doremus, “*La théologie politique de Carl Schmitt vue par Hugo Ball en 1924*,” *Les Études Philosophiques* 68 (2004), p. 58. On Ball and Schmitt in Dada and beyond, see also my “*Complexio Oppositorum: Hugo Ball and Carl Schmitt*,” *October* 146 (Fall 2013): pp. 31-64.

evening to allow the audience time to recover, a decision that he would repeat in subsequent performances according to Hans Richter: “Tzara had skillfully arranged things so that this simultaneous poem closed the first half of the programme. Otherwise, there would have been a riot at this early stage in the proceedings and the balloon would have gone up too soon. An animated interval, in which the inflamed passions of the audience gathered strength for a defiant response to any new defiance on our part.”¹⁸ The heavy vocal artillery that was directed toward the audience during *Froid Lumière* staged the simultaneous poem as the centerpiece and most scandalous gesture of the evening. As Tzara put it, “The public accommodates itself and rarifies the explosion of elective imbecility, each retaining their penchants and planting their hopes in the new spirit of Dada” (TOCI 564).

The complexity of the second score, as indicated already, is far greater. All that remains are six undated and untitled sheets filed under the heading “*Fiacre fièvreux et craquements âcres*” in Tzara’s archive. This score’s very identity has remained a mystery, lending cause to the total dearth of commentary that it has received thus far. I suggest that it is a score for a simultaneous poem that has been described in several Dada documents entitled *La Fièvre du Mâle* (The Fever of the Male) and which was listed on the program for the Eighth Dada Soirée at Zurich’s Sall zur Kaufleuten on April 9th, 1919 (Figure 3.5).¹⁹ Tzara himself offers some corroboration for this hypothesis in his

¹⁸ Hans Richter, *DADA: Art and Anti-Art*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965, p. 78

¹⁹ Raoul Schrott partially reproduces the sheets C6 and A6 in his book of Tzara documentation, and places it in correct chronological order among other works performed on April 9th, 1919. However, he does not, nor has any other scholar to my knowledge, explicitly identified the score as *La Fièvre du Mâle*. Schrott, pp. 212-213.

recollection of this performance by twenty speakers, which he described as Dada's "non plus ultra," citing two legible passages of the score, cited in French below:

LaUgHter (beginning) candies make an impression a single thread passes through the brains of 1500 spectators. And as soon as the curtain draws back over a shadowy scene before 20 people reciting the simultaneous poem 'LA FIÈVRE DU MÂLE' the scandal becomes menacing islands form in the room that accompany and underline the powerful shouts and simultaneous orchestration. Sign of blood. Revolt of the past of education: 'Fiacre fiévreux et 4 craquements âcres.' *Sous les ponts de Paris*. (TOCI 567).²⁰

If Tzara was exaggerating the *succès de scandale* of *La Fièvre du Mâle*, we know from contemporary reports that he was not alone in doing so. Maya Chrusecz published a review in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* on April 17th, 1919, describing the "ironic cheering" that greeted "a simultaneous poem directed by Tristan Tzara and executed by twenty persons."²¹ And the pianist and dancer Suzanne Perrottet (about whom more below) noted the "great success" of the evening: "I've read that there were 1500 persons at the last Dada Evening at the Kaufleutensaal, and that was 1919. There was a terrible racket because people were protesting, but at the end of the performance they were all silent. The noise came mainly from a simultaneous poem by Tzara '*La fièvre du Mâle*' with 20 voices speaking in French."²²

If the description seems to match, there is one evident problem with linking this score definitively with the performance of April 9th, 1919: for a work notoriously involving 20 performers, the extant manuscript comprises only 6 sheets (Figures 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11). The scores are classed into two alphabetic groups (A and C),

²⁰ Tzara misremembers the evening as the "ninth" Dada soirée.

²¹ M. CH. "Eine Skandalöse Soirée" *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 17.4.1919. Reproduced in Schrott, p. 208.

²² Suzanne Perrottet, *Suzanne Perrottet: ein bewegtes Leben*, Bern: Benteli, 1989, p. 138

each with a different set of parts: the A group (of which only A4 and A6 remain) has six parts for six performers, while the C group (of which only C2, C3, C4, and C6 still exist) has seven parts for seven performers. Despite the breadth of variation within and between the alphabetic groups, they were intended to function together, as is evident from the nearly identical division into rough sections, identified with curled brackets and red pencil marks, and the multi-linguistic instructions to run through the score four times with corresponding shifts in dynamics. On each page of the score, a pencil line underscores the appropriate part for the given speaker: i.e., in score A4, the part numbered 4 is underlined; in score C6, the part numbered 6 is underlined, etc. Although, the succession and continuity of the alphabet is precisely at issue in these scores, I would propose that it is safe to assume that there was a B group with seven parts, now lost, which would bring the number of performers to a total of twenty.²³

These difficulties in matching up the score with the descriptions of the performance point not only to the possibility of ad hoc improvisation or spontaneous departures from predetermined plans (certainly possible in Dada), but also to Tzara's attitude toward poetic text, which can be described as iterative if not serial: sounds, words and phrases often repeat in Tzara's oeuvre, appearing in several discrete poems or performances with multiple variations. For example, Tzara described singing the music hall song "*Sous les ponts de Paris*" (first released in 1913 with lyrics by Jean Rodor and music by Vincent Sotto) in the first days of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 (TOCI 561). Further, the last words of his poem *Calendrier* published in issue 4/5 of *Dada* on May 15,

²³ The identity of the performers is unfortunately unclear from the scores. A4, A6, C2, C3, and C4 include names scrawled at the bottom of the sheets, but they remain (at least to this reader) illegible. (The name on A4 seems to be "Gildemeister," A6 is a "Margot" whose last name begins with S, C2 is "Marg." with a last name beginning with G, and C4 was female speaker with the title "Fr.")

1919, were, “*fiacre fiévreux et 4 craquements âcres et macabres dans la baraque, ‘sous les ponts de paris.’*”²⁴ Once in Paris, Tzara performed a variation on *La Fièvre du Mâle* in May 1920 for 20 speakers, now titled *Vaseline Symphonique*, featuring the same words, which, pronounced in his Romanian accent, apparently drove André Breton from the room.²⁵

With the exception of these passages, *La Fièvre du Mâle* mostly abandons the word for a near infinity of linguistic cacophony. In shattering language down to sonorous shards, and seeking to put them back together in the form of a score, the simultaneous poems propel themselves into a zone of indeterminacy between poetry, music, and theater—each subject to mutual fragmentation. As Glauser put it, “Music fared no better than poetry.”²⁶ Indeed, the score for *La Fièvre du Mâle* possesses an array of different forms of notation, many more than in *Froid Lumière*: musical indications of dynamics in the form of instructions both linguistic (“piano,” “forte”) and graphic (the triangular bracket soliciting an increase in volume); the poetic text primarily made up of isolated letters or phonemic pairs, sometimes accompanied by visual elements such as a horizontal line to indicate sustain; and a legend of sorts at the bottom to indicate the number of repetitions and dynamic shifts (in German for some [“1. Mal”] and in French for others [“1^e fois”]) (Figure 3.7 and Figure 3.12). With even more intensity than in

²⁴ Tzara “Calendrier,” in *Dada* 4/5 (15 May 1919): p. 27. TOCI 127.

²⁵ *Vaseline Symphonique* was performed at the DADA Festival on May 26th, 1920, at the Salle Gaveau, 45 rue La Boétie. The press release advertised a “symphony for twenty voices” and proclaimed, “Finally, we will discover Dada’s sex.” Germaine Everling recalls: “Tzara avait composé une sorte de ‘symphonie’ sur une gamme montante, dont les seules paroles étaient: *Cra... cra... cra...* Elle repartait à la tierce avec *Cri... cri... cri...* Mais Breton, qui avait les nerfs à fleur de peau, ne pouvait supporter plus que cinq minutes la répétition de ces onomatopées. Il passait dans la pièce voisine en grinçant des dents! Tzara était également l’auteur d’un poème qui commençait ainsi: *Fièvre fiacreux et quatre dans la baraque...* Son accent roumain donnait une saveur toute particulière à cette attaque insolite.” Germaine Everling Picabia, “C’était hier: Dada...” Germaine Everling, “C’était hier: Dada...” *Oeuvres libres*, n. 109 (June 1955): p. 146.

²⁶ Friedrich Glauser, *Dada, Ascona, und andere Erinnerungen*, Zurich: Verlag der Arche, 1976, p. 56.

Froid Lumière, the sheer number of performers, instructions, and incongruous verbal proclamations would have attacked the boundaries between the word and the sound, the female and the male voice, the sung and the spoken, the individual and the ensemble—almost compelling the performers to fall out of sync. This is the impression confirmed by Richter, who described “A *poème simultané* by Tristan Tzara, performed by twenty people who did not always keep in time with each other. This was what the audience, and especially its younger members, had been waiting for. Shouts, whistles, chanting in unison, laughter... all of which mingled more or less anti-harmoniously with the bellowing of the twenty on the platform.”²⁷

This anti-harmonious impulse led Tzara to merge already existing and newly invented genres to the point of incoherence. At the First Dada Abend at Waag Hall on July 14th, 1916, Tzara performed a simultaneous poem entitled “*La fièvre puerpérale*” with Ball, Huelsenbeck, and Janco, then delivered a statement defining a new proliferation of poetic categories:²⁸

Tzara in tails stands before the curtain, abrupt, sober for the animals, and explains the new aesthetic: gymnastic poem, concert of vowels, bruitist poem, static poem chemical arrangement of ideas, Biriboom biriboom the ox whizzes round in a circle (Huelsenbeck), vowel poem a a ò, i e o, a i ì, new interpretation the subjective folly of the arteries the dance of the heart on burning buildings and acrobatics in the audience. (TOCI 563)

²⁷ Richter, p. 78.

²⁸ Little is known about *La Fièvre Puerpérale*, for which no score exists. Puerperal fever or “childbed fever” is a painful infection of the reproductive organs following childbirth. Henri Béhar notes, without however providing evidence, that *La Fièvre puerpérale* was incorporated into Tzara’s *La Première Aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine*, published on July 28th, 1916, in the form of two sections where each of the four characters (Mr. Cricri, Mr. Bleubleu, Pipi, and M Antipyrine) pronounce repetitive sounds in unison (TOCI, 639). The published version of *la Première Aventure...* also incorporates the First Dada Manifesto. On the basis of this information, Schrott has composed a typographical score of his own for *La Fièvre puerpérale*, which I consider to be speculative. See Schrott, p. 56.

According to the manuscript notes for Tzara's speech, he outlined the principles of the "poème bruitiste" ["noise poem"], the "poème statique," the "poème mouvementiste," and the "concert de voyelles" for the audience.²⁹ The borders between these forms seem porous (what is the difference, for example, between a vowel concert and a "poème de voyelles," or between the "poème gymnastique" and the "poème mouvementiste"?), and a performance such as *La Fièvre du Mâle* incorporated several characteristics of each category.³⁰ However, the most important "genres" for our purposes are the "poème bruitiste" and the "concert de voyelles." In the latter form, with clear relevance to both *Froid Lumière* and *La Fièvre du Mâle*, Tzara described a simultaneous symphony of vowels, noting, "to accentuate the purity of this conception we have taken only the most primitive elements of the voice." The "vowel concert," he continued, "begins with the principle that the vowel is the essence, the molecule of the letter, and consequently primitive sound itself. The scale of vowels corresponds to that of music" (TOCI 551-552).

The score for *La Fièvre du Mâle* demonstrates the limit-condition of Tzara's desire to prise the phrase, the word, and the letter from their semantic and syntactical mortar in order to "render to each element its integrity, its autonomy, the necessary condition for the creation of new constellations" (TOCI 403). Isolated linguistic "elements"—lyrics from popular song, whole words or phrases, or even simply the letter or vowel—are combined, repeated, and reorganized at will. Glauser wrote that, for Tzara, the eradication of syntax, as the framework holding the word's place in the phrase, was

²⁹ TZR 638, BLJD. The notes were not published in Tzara's lifetime, but are transcribed—not without errors unfortunately—in TOC I 551-552.

³⁰ The advertisement for the Waag Hall soirée lists Tzara's contribution as "Poème mouvementiste (masques par M. Janco), concert voyelle. Poème de voyelle. Poème bruitiste." TOC I, p. 725.

the precondition for blasting open the word itself, allowing the multiplication of letters and phonemic compounds across the score, to be bellowed into the crowd: “Syntax, which Rimbaud still sought to augment, should be slain and scattered because of its bourgeois origin.”³¹ While much of Tzara’s published poetry shattered syntax but maintained the word as the constitutive element to be reordered according to new principles—this is still the case, for example, in his famous recipe for a Dada poem drawn from the newspaper by chance, to be discussed below—the simultaneous poems, especially *La Fièvre du Mâle*, extend this principle of linguistic “chiseling” down to the letter as the base linguistic atom. Indeed, as Germaine Everling so perceptively put it in 1955, “*Lettrisme* had only to follow this a quarter of a century later.”³²

While deliriously anti-synchronic, then, the scores nevertheless have a constructive task: they reduce language down to its perceived granular essence, the letter or vowel, in order to reconstruct it along spatio-temporal axes for variable performative realization. Further, the “new constellations” liberated through the destruction of syntax, for Tzara, would shine not only on the page and the stage, but, most importantly, in the minds of the spectators who were called upon to synthesize the fragments of the poem in a manner parallel to the relational function of the score. The next section revisits a

³¹ Glauser, p. 56.

³² Everling, “C’était hier: Dada...” p. 146. I used the word “chiseling” expressly in the sense meant by the founder of the Lettrist group, Isidore Isou. For Isou, the history of poetic development occurred in two complementary yet opposed stages, an amplification phase, in which the resources of a language are explored and expanded (reaching its height in France with Victor Hugo), and a chiseling phase, in which these same resources are submitted to a process of reduction and negation. For Isou, Tzara’s Dada work could be situated as the next achievement after Mallarmé in this most recent chiseling phase, one that, of course, he and the Lettrists would be destined to bring to completion: “Evolving along the deepening of poetry, traveling through the necessary narrowing of material, the *poem* (Baudelaire), the *sentence* (Verlaine) and its destruction (Rimbaud), the *word* (Mallarmé) and its devaluation (Tzara), Isidore Isou is bringing THE LETTER.” Isou, *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 53. See the excellent recent account of the Lettrists, Hannah Feldman, “Sonic Youth, Sonic Space,” in *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 81-85.

primary theme from Chapter One, the status of the cognitive performance of the reader, to clarify the relationship between the simultaneous poem and the status of interpretation for Mallarmé and for cubism.

Cubism, Syntax, and the Poem as Score

In March 1920, Jean-Gabriel Lemoine, a reporter for *Le Gaulois*, dropped by the home of Francis Picabia, seemingly unannounced, to get a scoop on the phenomenon so new and yet ubiquitous that “young people speak of it with an air of mystery”: “*le Mouvement Dada.*”³³ Since Tzara himself arrived on Picabia’s doorstep in January of that year, the Paris Dada group had held four public manifestations (on January 23rd and February 5th, 7th, and 19th) and had found itself a topic of fervent discussion “in the studios, in the exhibitions, in all the salons that care only for the cutting edge.”³⁴ The person who opened the door to Lemoine, however, was not one of the anticipated “*promoteurs*” of Dada, not Picabia nor his Romanian houseguest, but “*une de leurs charmantes disciples,*” whom Lemoine didn’t bother to name, but who willingly chatted with him and provided a remarkable and candid account of the philosophical and aesthetic background for Dada—something neither of Dada’s “promoters” would have been likely to do.

The “disciple” was Germaine Everling, as she later confirmed: writer, active participant in Paris Dada, Picabia’s partner, and, as Pierre de Massot put it, a figure who

³³ Jean-Gabriel Lemoine, “Le Mouvement Dada,” *Le Gaulois* (March 20, 1920): p. 6. On Paris Dada more broadly, the canonical account is Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2009. For a more recent account of Dada performance in Paris, see TJ Demos, “Dada’s Event: Paris, 1921,” in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Eds Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 135-152.

³⁴ Lemoine, p. 6.

“turned Sundays at Picabia’s into the new Tuesdays at Mallarmé’s.”³⁵ In the interview with the unsympathetic journalist³⁶ Everling proclaimed that Dada was “the manifestation of our disgust for churches and schools,” a project “to liberate art from the conventions that constrict it, which fool the public to think of it as a strictly dogmatic religion.” The Dadaists, Everling stated, welcome the laughter of the public because “laughter is a liberation.”

When pressed by Lemoine on the “meaning of their literary and artistic manifestations,” she indicated with precision the place of Dada in a lineage stretching from Mallarmé:

Our writers emerge from Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire and seek to create a new language, purely aesthetic, which no longer has to be understood [*pas besoin d’être compris*]. You can reproach them for subjectivism, but, conversely, there’s nothing more objective than their language that has no goal but to inspire thought [*faire penser*].³⁷

Everling’s proposed that language, subtracted from its social instrumentality as from its orientation toward the production of singular meaning, would attain a state of “purity” in the hands of the Dadaists. Far from entailing the expressive product of a liberated artistic subjectivity or a Romantic creativity freed from social constraint and responsibility, the Dadaist word gave itself over to obdurate matter. The legacy of Mallarmé, Everling tells

³⁵ We know that this is Everling from a passing remark in her memoirs *L’Anneau de Saturne*, that in 1920, “Jean-Gabriel Lemoine, rédacteur au *Gaulois*, vint interviewer Picabia. Il fut reçu par moi.” Germaine Everling, *L’Anneau de Saturne*, Paris: Fayard, 1970, p. 107. De Massot is cited in *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁶ Despite his studiously neutral attitude in the interview, one gets a sense of Lemoine’s aesthetic ideology in an article from the following year in *Le Crapouillot*, “Our modern art is afflicted with a disease from which it may yet die—a disease bred in the unwholesome atmosphere of cities, and especially of a city like Paris. Paris attracts the artists of all France, perverts them, sours them, kills them. No artist can produce serious, lasting work in Paris. The art of Paris is insincere. Paris is blasé. We want to see the regional schools reborn in the provinces. French art is suffering from Parisian anaemia. In a return to regionalism lies the cure.” Cited in No author, “Topics of the day in art: Ruinous Parisianism,” *Arts and Decoration: A magazine of the fine and industrial arts*, v. 14, n. 4 (February 1921): p. 291.

³⁷ Lemoine, “Le Mouvement Dada,” p. 6

us, was the construction of an asignifying language that had no other goal but to “inspire thought” for the reader or listener, without, for that matter, orienting it toward the end of “understanding.”

In de Massot’s early history of Dada, *De Mallarmé à 391* (1922), a book dedicated to his close friends Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, it is affirmed that “the poet of *Hérodiate* is still the basis of the contemporary movement.”³⁸ However, the question of the meaning of Mallarmé, of *which* Mallarmé was in question, was fraught and unstable. While in the “Note pour les bourgeois” Tzara had affirmed the influence of “Mallarmé[’s] typographic reform in his poem *Un Coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le Hasard*,” (TOCI 492) only five years later, Tzara pointed critically to the afterlife of the Mallarméan project in the varieties of post-cubist painterly culture:

Mallarmé has become a false glory since the commercial zeal of the *Nouvelle revue Française* introduced us to his miserable *Vers de circonstances*, which reveal only the banal and constrained spirit of its author. I consider myself robbed by Mallarmé, for in re-reading his poems that I had loved most, I can now only see in them a mechanical syntactical procedure that is purely exterior and whose relative beauty resides only in work. It’s for this reason that I’m not astounded by the sympathy certain ‘constructive’ Cubists have for him.³⁹

Therefore, like Kahnweiler, Tzara linked Mallarmé and cubism on the basis of their shared devotion to problems of aesthetic structure; yet unlike Kahnweiler, he noted that the excess of constructive energy led only to “banality and constraint.” As Tzara put it in his “Dada Manifesto” of 1918, Dada evinced a “distrust toward unity” set against the “cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas” (TOCI 361).

³⁸ Pierre de Massot, *De Mallarmé à 391*, Saint-Raphael: Au Bel Exempleire, 1922, p.14.

³⁹ BLJD TZR 661.14. This text was later appended to an edition of the *Sept Manifestes Dada* from 1960 and included in his collected writings as “Réponse à une enquête,” TOCI 418.

The “constructive cubists,” as Tzara pejoratively called the *Section d’Or* and Purist painters, took from Mallarmé’s work merely a “mechanical syntactical procedure,” he claimed. In a passage that could describe a purist painting by Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), such as *Nature Morte*, 1920 (Figure 3.12), in an essay titled “Gestes, Ponctuation et Langage Poétique,” Tzara later described Mallarmé’s poetic ideal as “the object-poem, the poem that is whole, closed, spherical in other words, which has, in its exterior form as much as in its content, an architectural and polished character, with a construction that is shiny and smooth, aspiring to perfection” (TOCV 233-234). This conception of structure pointed to one danger inherent in the “purist” epistemic formation described by Everling, which could lead to an arid formalism, a “spherical” poem with every edge polished into oblivion. Upon his arrival in Paris, Tzara associated this Mallarméanism with the fading glory of cubism. As he wrote, “The cubists and futurists, who should freely vibrate with joy at having liberated appearance from a cumbersome and futile exterior, instead become scientific and propose an academy” (TOCI 409). That same year, 1920, Tzara made no efforts to hide his contempt for the *Section d’or* cubists, publishing in *391* his notorious “interview” with Metzinger, which, he claimed, was carried out in the home of a “*demi-mondaine*” who wished to trade her collection of cubist paintings for a “*capote en Gleizes*.”⁴⁰

While Tzara deplored the sterile structure of purist “cubism” and the excess of structure in Mallarmé, he framed the simultaneous poems within the lineage of both. Indeed, in the “Note pour les bourgeois,” Tzara stated that the simultaneous poem synthesized the “typographic reform” of *Un Coup de Dés* and “the transmutation of

⁴⁰ Here, Tzara constructs a juvenile pun on Gleizes’s name and “*capote anglaise*”: a condom. I put interview in quotation marks, because the veracity of Metzinger’s contribution has never been established. Tzara, “Interview de Jean Metzinger,” *391*, N 14, (Paris, Nov 1920), p. 8. TOC I 569.

objects and colors by the first cubist painters (1907) Picasso, Braque, Picabia, Duchamp-Villon, Delaunay [which] gave the desire to apply to poetry these same simultaneous principles” (TOCI 492). In cubism and Mallarmé, Tzara discovered the “principle” for his Dada mode of poetic notation, which, as he put it, would allow “each listener to retain the elements characteristic for their personality, intermix them, fragment them, etc. remaining all the same in the direction that the author has established” (TOCI 493).

This description of the cognitive performance of the audience member, who amalgamates the fragmentary cacophony of the simultaneous poem, mediating between their own personality and that of the author, shares certain fundamental features with the “associationist” theory of cubism developed by Kahnweiler and discussed in Chapter One. The Zurich Dadaists were in fact in contact with the dealer at this time, who was spending the war years a short train ride away in Bern, writing *Der Gegenstand der Ästhetik* and the text that would later become the *Rise of Cubism*. According to the documentary chronology established by Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, Tzara and Kahnweiler met in November 1915, at Zurich’s Galerie Tanner on the occasion of an exhibition of collages by Arp, and shortly thereafter began a correspondence that continued into 1918, with the Dadaist sending the dealer every issue of *Dada* and his own publications.⁴¹

Kahnweiler later recalled about the Dadaists, “I went once or twice to Zurich, but they

⁴¹ Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984, p. 125. Tzara also sent Kahnweiler his complete collection of *Nord Sud* magazine in 1918, as the dealer was composing a memorial text on Apollinaire, who had died that November. See the letter dated November 30th, 1918, in TZR C 2217, BLJD. Further, Arp, who had visited Kahnweiler’s gallery in Paris in 1912, asked the dealer for works by Picasso to reproduce for *Cabaret Voltaire*, and he obliged with *Standing Figure (Mlle Léonie)*, Picasso’s etching for Max Jacob’s *Saint Matorel*, which appeared only three pages after *L’Amiral*.... He then visits Kahnweiler in Bern, where the latter lends him a copy of Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy*, a work that Arp considered “le livre le plus clair que je connaisse sur l’art moderne.” Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris: Collection Kahnweiler-Leiris*, Paris: Le Musée, 1984, p. 11.

came to see me too. I saw Tzara and Arp several times.”⁴² It is certain that conversation turned to matters of aesthetics—Kahnweiler lent Arp a copy of Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy*, for example—and, most significantly, the dealer sent Arp his manuscript for the essay “*Der Kubismus*” in spring 1916, which contained many of the essential points later expanded upon in the *Rise of Cubism*.⁴³ Arp wrote back to Kahnweiler, stating “I was thrilled to discover that you were the author of this text. I am doubly thrilled because I know the extent to which it depends on a real familiarity [with cubism].”⁴⁴ Arp, in fact, helped to secure the publication of “*Der Kubismus*” in the Zurich newspaper *Die Weißen Blätter* through his connections with the paper’s editor René Schickele, and the text appeared in September 1916.⁴⁵

While it is impossible to know whether Tzara read Kahnweiler’s manuscript when it was in Arp’s hands, or whether the dealer shared his aesthetic theory with the Dadaists during one of their visits, the lecture that Tzara gave on the new poetic genres in July 1916 indicates a similar reading of collage⁴⁶: “The *bruitiste poem*... is also based on the theory of the new performance [*interprétation*]. It introduces real noises to reinforce and

⁴² Kahnweiler, *Mes galeries et mes peintres: Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 78.

⁴³ Arp had visited Kahnweiler’s gallery on the rue Vignon as early as 1912, and knew the dealer prior to their Swiss exile. Kahnweiler also sent Arp a copy of Wilhelm Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy*, about which they corresponded. For more on Arp and Kahnweiler, see Agnès Angliviel de la Baumelle, “Hans Arp,” in Monod-Fontaine, *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris*, pp. 10-12. See also Eric Michaud, “Jean Arp et le “plaisir de détruire,” *Mélusine*, N. 9 (Sept 1986): pp. 149-150.

⁴⁴ Monod-Fontaine, *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ *Die Weißen Blätter* [the white sheets] was a newspaper founded in Leipzig by Eric-Ernst Schwabach, and published during the War in Zurich by René Schickele from 1915. The journal was notable for its pacifist stance, and published Hugo Ball’s “*Totenrede für Hans Leybold*” in April 1915, among others.

⁴⁶ Tzara later recalled, “Kahnweiler is a remarkable character... and to call him an art dealer has always seemed to me an abuse of words because he was rather a thinker, an impresario, a great editor.” Tzara, “Le cubisme et son temps,” TOCV 443.

intensify the poem. In this sense, it is the first time that we've introduced concrete reality into the poem, corresponding to the reality applied by the cubists in their paintings" (TOC I 551). This passage calls to mind Kahnweiler's description of the cognitive "process of association" [*Assoziationsprozeß*] occasioned by the *trompe l'oeil* "'real' details" in Picasso and Braque's paintings that provided "tactile association of memory-images evoked in the beholder, by whose looking gives the physical representation of the intended object in the painting."⁴⁷ Kahnweiler's account of the cognitive "reading" occasioned by a cubist painting was oriented toward the reconstruction of an object in the viewer's mind, complete with the tactile three-dimensionality provided by memory through the "stimulus" of real details, allowing them to, "in the words of Kant, 'put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in one perception'" (RC 12).⁴⁸ If Kahnweiler later compared this process to Mallarmé's poetics, Tzara's proposal that the audience of a simultaneous poem "fragments and intermixes" the "real noises" of the poem in their minds was also based on his reading of Mallarmé's final poem *Un Coup de Dés*.

Tzara later outlined a Mallarméan legacy, irreconcilable to that described by Kahnweiler, in his important "Essai sur la situation de la poésie," published in *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* in 1931, a text that attempts to think the history of the avant-gardes in line with the tenets of dialectical materialism. Claiming that "the most urgent task of poetry... is to organize the use of the dream, of laziness, of leisure in view of a communist society," Tzara proposed to "negate poetry as an expressive medium" and to build "poetry as intellectual activity," by drawing on a lineage stretching

⁴⁷ Daniel Henry, "Der Kubismus" *Die Weißen Blätter*, n. 9 (September 1916): p. 219.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

from Villon through to Mallarmé and finally into Dada (TOCV 27). Though couched in Jungian-Marxist jargon that Tzara had not yet acquired in the Dada years, this essay contains several remarks that are illuminating with respect to his reading of Mallarmé against the grain of the Cubists “constructors” and Kahnweiler alike:

Poetry as intellectual activity disintegrated the hard cement of a fortress that had seemed impossible to attack: syntax. Mallarmé drew legitimate conclusions from this new situation and, in certain cases, suppressed all punctuation in his poetry. In *Un Coup de Dés*, going much further still, he typographically disposed blanks and different characters according to a *mode of notation* that opened poetry to fertile perspectives (TOCV 13).

In this reading, Mallarmé appears not as the operator of “syntax as a mechanical procedure,” but as engaged in a process of careful demolition, chipping away at the cement that holds language in place, so as to free it for “new constellations.” Following Mallarmé, Tzara wrote, “From this negation of the negation is born a new poetry, elevated to a force that can only be found on the psychic plane of the collectivity.”⁴⁹ As a motto for this future poetic socialism, Tzara cited Lautréamont’s maxim, so dear to the avant-gardes from the Surrealists to the Situationists: “Poetry should be made by all, not by one” (TOCV 28). As will be discussed below with respect to Mallarmé’s *Livre*, Tzara pointed precisely to a dimension of Mallarmé’s thought that sought to negate language’s function as a medium of personal expression with the hope that an impersonal poetics might establish a new relation to the collectivity.

If Glauser claimed that Rimbaud had merely “augmented” syntax and therefore remained within the bounds of a bourgeois use of language, Tzara insisted that the “fertile perspectives” implied by Mallarmé had to do with his invention of a new “mode of notation” for poetry. The very conception of a poetic “mode of notation” for someone

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

of Tzara's generation would have derived directly from the preface written by Mallarmé for *Un Coup de Dés* in its original *Cosmopolis* publication of 1897.⁵⁰ There, Mallarmé described the poem's "spatialization of reading," in which "the paper intervenes each time an image of its own" (OCI 391) (Figure 3.13). *Un Coup de Dés*, he wrote, interrupts the linearity of reading to propose the poem as a "musical score," engaging the creativity of the reader with multiple possibilities for engagement and interpretation: "the nature of the characters employed and the positioning of the blanks substitute for musical notes and intervals" (OCI 391).

While the ostensible subject of *Un Coup de Dés* is the desperate act of a character known as "*le Maître*", who shakes two dice in his fist, hesitating to throw them, as he goes down in a shipwreck, the main protagonist is, in many ways, the reader herself, who navigates the multiple paths opened by the text. She could, for example, follow the train of large capitals spread out through the pages to reconstruct the title, or focus on the secondary line, "*Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu, excepté peut-être, une constellation*" (OCI 384-387): "Nothing will have taken place but the place, except perhaps a constellation," words that allegorize the poem as a cosmic stage for the reader's performance.

The poetic function itself, then, is shifted from the writer to the reader, who is called upon to perform the "prismatic subdivision of the Idea," as Mallarmé put it in his introduction, through the act of engaging with the text, imagining a poem that would be made, if not by all, then certainly not by one alone (OCI 391). Mallarmé affirmed that

⁵⁰ Remarkably, Tzara owned a copy of the May 1897 issue of *Cosmopolis* with Mallarmé's poem. It is unclear when exactly when the volume entered Tzara's collection, but it is tempting to interpret the stamp to Bucharest on the cover as indicating that he acquired it prior to his emigration in August 1916. See the catalogue for the sales of Tzara's collection of manuscripts and rare books, Hôtel Drouot, *Importante partie de la bibliothèque de Tristan Tzara*, Paris: Guy Loudmer, 1989, cat. # 287

this shift between aesthetic production and reception was made possible, as the introduction argued, by *Un Coup de Dés*' shattering of standard poetic structure "under a strange influence, that of Music":

This copied distance, which mentally separates words or groups of words from one another, has the literary advantage, if I may say so, of seeming to speed up and slow down the movement, of scanning it, and even of intimating it through a simultaneous vision of the page: the latter is taken as the basic unit, in the way that elsewhere the Verse or the perfect line is. The fiction rises to the surface and quickly dissipates, following the variable motion of the writing, around the fragmentary interruptions of a central phrase, a phrase introduced from the title and continuing onward. Everything that occurs is foreshortened and, as it were, hypothetical; narrative is avoided. Add that from this stripped down mode of thought, with its retreats, prolongations, flights, or from its very design, there results, for whoever would read it aloud, a musical score. (OCI 391)⁵¹

The poem as "musical score" demanded an interplay between the pure exteriority of the "scattered notation" on the page and the reader's interiority, which is called upon to transform the physical space of the book into what Mallarmé elsewhere calls a "mental commodity [*la denrée mentale*]" (OCII 219).⁵² It is important to insist that Mallarmé did not describe a linear passage from the page to mental space, but imagined a co-penetration made possible by the "dispersal" of the poetic text, which is to say by the interruption of the reader's "naive" habit of beginning at the first word and continuing to the end—via "*le va-et-vient successif incessant du regard*" (OCI 391). The poem is triply divided between the visual space of the page ("an image, of itself," "a simultaneous vision") the sonic relations of words ("regular sonic lineaments," "silence surrounding")

⁵¹ I have used here the translation by C.F. MacIntyre in Mallarmé, *Selected Poems*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 121-122.

⁵² In his critique of contemporary "cognitive turn" in the humanities, the philosopher Vincent Descombes borrowed Mallarmé's expression "denrée mentale" See Descombes, *The Mind's Provisions: A critique of Cognitivism*, Translated by Stephen Adam Schwartz Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

and the “foreshortened, hypothetical state” of the reader’s mind, “some precise mental context” (OCI 391-392).

The “genre” of such a poem “little by little becomes like the symphony” set against forms of “personal song.” The musicalization of poetry, for Mallarmé, was by no means limited to the sonic qualities of the phoneme—a condition of all verse—but designated the playful alternation between the material site of language and the theater of the mind. As Mallarmé put it elsewhere,

A solitary tacit concert is performed, through the act of reading, for the soul, which regains, with a lesser sonority, signification: none of the mental ways to exalt a symphony will be left out, just rarefied and that’s all—due to the fact of thought. Poetry, close to the idea, is Music par excellence—doesn’t admit inferiority (D 228-29).

Poetry’s relation to music, then, was by no means secondary or imitative: in fact, in Mallarmé’s view, poetry could be said to *realize* the musical as such, by abolishing, preserving, and overcoming it. Poetry’s priority over music was secured for Mallarmé by its linguistic substance, its proximity to the “idea” and to the movement of thought itself. The reader “regains, with a lesser sonority, signification,” thus drawing “close to the idea,” “due to the fact of thought”; yet this “tacit” process of ideation can never (and should never) separate itself from the sonorous relationships between words (OCI 391-392). What emerged from the distribution of words “like pieces on a keyboard, active, measured by pages,” was a vision of a new form of writing addressed to “the [reader’s] initiative, lightning-like, to tie up the fragmentary notations” (D 228).

The stakes of the musicalization of poetry for Mallarmé will become clearer below, but what of the status of the reader’s personality? Having discussed Kahnweiler’s neo-Kantian conception of the form-giving creativity of the Ego, and the discourse of

“anonymity” sought by Picasso and Mallarmé, it remains to be seen to what extent these models can account for Tzara’s idiosyncratic claim that, confronted with the simultaneous poem, “each listener... retain[s] the elements characteristic of their personality... remaining all the same in the direction that the author has established.” An initial answer is indicated by Tzara’s “recipe for a Dadaist poem,” published in Breton’s journal *Littérature* in 1920 upon Tzara’s arrival in Paris, which centered precisely on the connection or contradiction between the desire for interpretive creativity and the incorporation “into poetry of elements judged to be unworthy, like newspaper phrases, noises, and sounds” (Figure 3.14).⁵³ In this text, Tzara asked the reader to cut out each word of a newspaper article, place them in a hat, and paste each word on a page in random order. Tzara informed the reader how to produce a “poem [that] will resemble you,” in order to “find yourself a writer of infinite originality and of a charming sensibility, although incomprehensible to the vulgar masses” (TOCI 382).⁵⁴ The element of poetic “choice” for Tzara is here limited solely to the length of the poem—“choose in the newspaper an article of the same length that you intend to give your poem”—, to the structural frame for the work, and to its syntactical matrix. The poem “resembled” its author, then, to the degree that identity was now imagined to be constructed from the impersonal language of journalism and subjected to a totally aleatory process. Tzara’s poem can be conceived as a synthesis of the *papiers collés* and *Un Coup de Dés*:

⁵³ “En 1916, je tâchais de détruire les genres littéraires. J’introduisais dans les poèmes des éléments jugés indignes d’en faire partie, comme des phrases de journal, des bruits et des sons. Ces sonorités (qui n’avaient rien de commun avec les sons imitatifs) devait constituer une parallèle aux recherches de Picasso, Matisse, Derain, qui employaient dans les tableaux des *matières* différentes” Tzara, “Lettre de Tzara à Doucet [Paris, le 30 Octobre 1922],” TOCI 643.

⁵⁴ Originally published as Tzara, “Pour faire un poème dadaïste,” in *Littérature*, n. 15 (July 1920): p. 18. An example of such a poem, the only of its kind that Tzara would publish, is found in the next issue, Tzara, “Lorsque les chiens traversent...” *Littérature*, n. 16 (September 1920): p. 9.

Mallarmé (and Picasso, I argued) sought to restrict the action of the artist to a vanishingly small space for the enunciation of subjectivity in order to construct a stage for the creative play of the reader. Tzara, conversely, refused even the smallest remainder of interpretive redemption: to the extent that the audience of the simultaneous poem could discover the characteristics of their personalities in the barrage of noise or that the maker of the newspaper poem could recognize their sensibility in the random journalistic detritus, the very coherence and unity of the subject was fractured.

Dance-Writing

While, for Tzara, the metaphor of the poem-as-score and its potential politics of spectatorship derived from Mallarmé—a point to which we shall return—its form was intimately bound up with the contemporaneous “movement analysis” being conducted at the School of Dance run by Laban in Zurich. Dancers from the Laban School such as Wulff and Chrusecz both performed in *Froid Lumière*, and others were regular fixtures at the Cabaret Voltaire and the Galerie Dada, performing, dancing, or designing costumes, such as Perrottet, Clara Walther, Mary Wigman, and one core member of the Zurich Dada group, Taeuber. With the exception of Taeuber, however, these figures are too often relegated in histories of Dada to mere performers, or, worse, to romantic liaisons—a misogynist revision initiated by the male Dadaists themselves.⁵⁵ Yet, the dancers from the Laban school were crucial sources of knowledge about radical developments in contemporary music and dance. For example, Perrottet, who went on to a storied career

⁵⁵ Hans Richter recalls, “If the Odéon was our terrestrial base, our celestial headquarters was Laban’s ballet school. There we met young dancers of our generation. Mary Wigman, Maria Vanselow, Sophie Taeuber, Susanne Perrottet, Maja Kruscek, Käthe Wulff and others. Only at certain fixed times were we allowed into this nunnery, with which we all had more or less emotional ties, whether fleeting or permanent.” Richter, p. 69.

as a dancer and choreographer, introduced the Zurich Dadaists to the work of Arnold Schoenberg, whose piano compositions she performed at the Cabaret Voltaire. “This was my role with the Dadaists,” Perrottet recalled, “to demonstrate the most modern music of the new age [*neuzeitliche*] to the public.” This “new dissonant music,” which Perrottet had studied and performed before arriving in Zurich, promised the emancipation of sound from the strictures of traditional tonality, and suggested parallel projects could be carried out in dance and in poetry.⁵⁶

Indeed, Perrottet emphasized in her memoirs the collaborative role of the Laban dancers in the formulation of the simultaneous poem, writing that for all the commentary on Tzara’s “bravado,” his “turbulent and active” persona, “one has remarked little on what I experienced with him, something that he rehearsed with us Labanians [*Labanleuten*]”⁵⁷: “It was a poem, a simultaneous poem. I no longer recall the title. But it was ... voices talking to each other as in a score in music. We read from quite distinct texts and Tzara was the director.... I had to be like a snake in it, and here and there drown the rest out with a song from Paris: *Sous les ponts de Paris*.”⁵⁸

We can suppose, therefore, that Perrottet was a performer in *La Fièvre du Mâle*. But, more importantly, it is certain that the “Laban ladies,” as Hugo Ball condescendingly called them, were a direct (if disavowed) stimulus for Tzara’s decision to invent a mode of notation and visualization—a diagrammatization—of language.⁵⁹ Richter recalled a ballet titled *Die Kaufleute* (‘the Merchants’), performed in 1916 by Taeuber and Wulff,

⁵⁶ For more, see Perrottet, p. 137-138.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*, Ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 104.

with masks by Janco and an abstract mural by Arp and Richter. Little is known of this performance, and no photographs exist, but evidently it involved a new form of dance notation planned by Wulff and Taeuber. As Richter put it,

These highly personal contacts—and Laban’s revolutionary contribution to choreography—finally involved the whole Laban school in the Dada movement. Its students danced in the ballet *Die Kaufleute* (‘the Merchants’). In front of abstract backdrops (‘cucumber plantations’) by Arp and myself, dancers wearing Janco’s abstract masks fluttered like butterflies of Ensor, drilled and directed according to a choreography written down by Käthe Wulff and Sophie Taeuber in Laban’s system of notation.⁶⁰

However, Laban’s system of choreographic notation, which came to be known as *Labanotation* and which is still used today, was only published in 1928, as *Kinetographie Laban* or *Schriftanz* [dance writing]. Instead, the Dada years marked a period of experimentation on the potential and function of notation, in which the relation between movement and writing, sound and concept, were still being worked out, subject to variation and collaboration.

Wulff and Taeuber’s notation for the *Merchants* is lost, yet a manuscript fragment of a conceptual and visual diagram by Wulff from precisely these years demonstrates that the notion of constructing a symbolic schema for movement was not Laban’s invention alone but was developed, expanded, and shared by the dancers who also contributed to Tzara’s scores (Figure 3.15). On the one hand, the notations, potentially made during a workshop with Laban, are rather traditionally Germanic mappings of conceptual oppositions, with the Will [*Wille*] opposed to Intellect [*Verstand*] and Sensation [*Empfindung*] opposed to Thought [*Gedanke*]. On the other hand, their very drive to visualize a spatial passage (in the sheet numbered 4) from Desire [*Wollen*] to Action

⁶⁰ Richter, p. 69

[*Handeln*], and to think about such concepts in terms of the diagrammatization of movement, places Wulff's notations at the border between the tenets of the Laban school and the experiments of Dada. Indeed, on the latter point, Wulff's abstract notation contains the words "Kälte" and "Licht"—Cold light—or "Froid lumière" the title of the simultaneous poem in which she performed that very year.

Laban founded his Zurich dance company in 1915 as a *Lebenschule*, "a place for the education of reformers... a gathering place for novel endeavors in form, in ways of living, culture and art," in which dance would play a crucial mediating role.⁶¹ Before adopting the term *Kinetographie*, Laban used the term *Schrifttanz* and speculated, "a dance notation shall not only record and preserve man's spiritual or physical store or movement. The scope of dance notation must also include the representation of the immanent laws of movement in such a way that dance composition and the universal order of movement gain through it both a basis and a guide."⁶² Expressing the totalizing aspirations of the school, Laban proposed, "Only when dance becomes a language of choreographic will, only when it finds its own notation... can it offer, as an equal among the arts, ... what its sister arts music and poetry offer... joy exhilaration, meaning, strength, and culture."⁶³

The first diagram in Wulff's notes subdivided its conceptual oppositions in a bilaterally symmetrical diagram, with *Persönlichkeit* [personality] labeling the cephalic orb at the apex. In the definitive version of Laban's notational system, this right-left

⁶¹ Cited in Evelyn Dörr, *Rudolf Laban: The Dancer of the Crystal*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008, p. 49.

⁶² Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶³ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 113

division is explicitly associated with the verticality and symmetry of the human body. A score written in *Labanotation* is read temporally from bottom to top, with the left and right halves along the central divide indicating the sides of the performer's body from their own point of view (Figure 3.16). The symbols are an alphabet of sorts establishing the molecular elements of movement, such as duration, level, direction, and body part.

Wigman, who was one of Laban's closest collaborators and a frequent participant at the Cabaret Voltaire⁶⁴, wrote that the goal shared by the Labanians was to "liberate dance from its slave-like association with music, and reinstate its independence and beauty of an absolute language."⁶⁵ Toward an abstract or autonomous dance the Labanians "pursued movement to its smallest detail and proved that its liberated material can be brought into an organically unified compositional form."⁶⁶ Wigman recalled that during her studies with Laban in Ascona in 1914, he was developing "movement scales" and attempting to codify them into a notational system: "The first of these scales consisted of five different swinging movements leading in a spiral line from downward to upward. The organic combination of their spatial directions and their natural three dimensional qualities led to a perfect harmony."⁶⁷ Working with the minimal unit of liberated corporeal motion, Wigman noted, "dance-script" or dance-notation would codify new and non-hierarchical relations between "dance, sound, [and] word," "to

⁶⁴ Mary Wigman, one of Laban's closest associates from 1913 onward, and went on to become one of the most important and famous dancers of the Weimar years, was present according to Ball for the performance of *Froid Lumière*. See Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time*, ed and trans John Elderfield, New York: Viking Press, 1974, p. 110. According to Perrottet, Wigman, "could warm up to the Dadaists, but not however to their ideas." Perrottet 1989, p. 139.

⁶⁵ Cited in Vera Maletic, *Body, Space, Expression: The Development of Rudolf Laban's Movement and Dance Concepts*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Cited in *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Mary Wigman, *The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings Edited and Translated*, Ed. Walter Sorell, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973, p. 38.

demonstrate.... the unshakeable one-ness of force, time and space.”⁶⁸ Wigman recalled of Laban, “He told me once that it was the vision of a great work of art, a combination of dance, music, and poetry, which started him on his way.... Laban had to build up the new instrument himself and find the means of doing so.”⁶⁹

Like Schoenberg, whose achievement of free atonality did not remain in a state of expressionist spontaneity but was soon constrained within the twelve tone row of the serialist system, the Labanian dance-script was involved in the paradigmatically modernist project of analyzing base “molecular” elements of aesthetic form in order to search for a new principle of organization or motivation. As Fredric Jameson put it, Schoenberg’s compositional system, and its development by Webern, demonstrated that “the shattering of the tonal framework frees the individual notes themselves from whatever had previously given them meaning,” revealing the note as “a neutral and nonsignifying element like the phoneme in speech.”⁷⁰ In contrast, Laban’s project was always oriented toward unification—of genres and of bodies with time and with motion—against the reign of the fragment. Indeed, in the 1930s, Laban sought to lend his work to the development of mass spectacles for the Nazis, expanding his harmonic-

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* As Mark Franko puts it, “movement analysis [is a means] through which one separates out and considers in isolation the body’s relation to space, time, qualities of energy, and affinities of action with cognitive attitudes toward the world of the human subject in motion. In order to see, archive, and record movement, Laban recognized, a written language was needed to describe not only what took place but also how it took place.” Mark Franko, “Danced Abstraction: Rudolf von Laban,” and “Danced Abstraction: Mary Wigman,” in *Inventing Abstraction*, ed. Leah Dickerman. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012, p. 294.

⁶⁹ Wigman, *The Mary Wigman Book*, p. 32

⁷⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 25.

organic plotting of movement to encompass large groups of performers, even planning a work for 1000 dancers (*Vom Tauwind und der neuen Freude*, 1936).⁷¹

Labanotation in its definitive form emphasized integration of genres, formal unity, exactitude in notation, and repeatability in performance. These were, as I've shown, the exact qualities that Tzara sought to undermine in the simultaneous poems, staging the mutual interruption of the arts, formal fragmentation, notational ambiguity, and total variability in performance. At this moment, then, the score was at the crux of two tendencies held in opposition within modernism: totality and fragmentation. If Laban sought a totalizing system of relations that could lend order to the infinite variety of movement, the simultaneous poem broke open the phrase and then the word to release the asignifying materiality of vocal sound. The model of notation developed by Tzara in dialogue with the truant dancers Wulff, Perrottet, Taeuber, and Chrusecz gave the raw sonorous matter of language over to chance, indeterminacy and flux.

This dialectic of fragmentation and totality was so often the terrain upon which modernism's social imaginary played itself out. If, in the debates about expressionism between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch from 1938, the former could call for an art to reveal the total system of relations that underlay the appearance of fragmentation on the surface of the social world, the latter posed the question "What if authentic reality is also discontinuity?"⁷² The simultaneous poem, I will argue, answered Bloch's question in the affirmative, conceiving the fragmentations, ruptures and discontinuities set in play by the

⁷¹ See Franko in Dickerman, *Inventing Abstraction*, pp. 292-299.

⁷² Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 22.

Dada score as a mimetic form appropriate to a fractured social totality.⁷³ In doing so, Tzara's notations give a new response to the proposals of Mallarmé's life's work, *Le Livre*, which sought precisely to imagine an aesthetic structure appropriate to a future public that would discover their very principle of being-together in the fissures of language. I now turn to consider this project and its critical relation to the total work of art as developed by Richard Wagner, in order to elucidate the simultaneous poem score's articulation between the synthesis (or fragmentation) of genres and the constitution (or dispersal) of the human community itself.

***Le Livre* and the "Simultaneous Method of Reading"**

For much of the 1890s, Mallarmé was devoted to *Le Livre*, which he described publicly in his widely read prose works, discussed with peers at his Tuesday literary salon, and planned privately in a sprawling manuscript now held at the Houghton Library.⁷⁴ What remains of *Le Livre* is approximately two hundred enigmatic *feuilletts* that Mallarmé composed in the final decade of his life, gathered into an album kept in a lacquered cabinet and ordered destroyed from his deathbed. We owe our knowledge of

⁷³ In this, I concur with Hal Foster's assessment of the mimetic dimension of Zurich Dada. Regarding the function of trauma for Hugo Ball, Foster describes a mode of "mimetic adaptation, whereby the Dadaist assumes the dire conditions of his time—the armoring of the military body, the fragmenting of the industrial worker, the commodifying of the capitalist subject—and inflates them through hyperbole or 'hypertrophy' (another Dadaist term)." See Hal Foster, "Dada Mime," *October* V 105 (Summer 2003): p. 169

⁷⁴ The relationship between the *Livre* and *Un Coup de Dés* is controversial. Claudel, for example, summed up the view that *Un Coup de Dés* is a fragment from that great unfinished work: "Dans l'esprit de Mallarmé ce travail n'était que le premier essai d'un grand poème, où... il aurait voulu renfermer l'explication du monde." Paul Claudel, *Positions et propositions*, v. I, Paris: Gallimard, 1946, p. 123. On the other hand, Quentin Meillassoux reads the final poem as a renunciation of *Le Livre*'s utopianism, and its realization in the invention of a coded poetic meter in *Un Coup de Dés*: "La découverte d'un code dans le *Coup de Dés* impliquerait que Mallarmé n'a jamais récusé—en tout cas en son principe—le projet calculatoire du Livre. Dire que le *Coup de Dés* est codé, c'est dire que l'interruption du Livre ne fut pas le signe d'un échec nécessaire, mais d'une recherche sur les calculs symboliques ayant soudain pris une autre forme." Quentin Meillassoux, *Le Nombre et la sirène*, Paris: Fayard, 2011, p. 15

this project to the refusal of his daughter, wife, and son-in-law to follow his instructions to burn “the semi-secular heap of my notes, which will bring you nothing but great embarrassment.”⁷⁵ The status of these notes in Mallarmé’s oeuvre is riven: they are at once central—the concrete plans for the poet’s life’s work—and almost literally marginal. On the one hand, the notes appear as the lynchpin of Mallarmé’s poetics, a view summarized by Jacques Scherer, who writes, “the entire *oeuvre* of Mallarmé, from at least 1866, is explained by and oriented toward *le Livre*, which is its culmination... [providing] the unity and the sense of the mallarméan creation.”⁷⁶ And yet, on the other hand, not a single page of this manuscript, not a single passage or even word, could be said to definitively *belong* to the *Livre*. Indeed, the notes circumscribe an absence at the very heart of Mallarmé’s work: they are not only hermetic or enigmatic (this much one would expect), but, much more troubling, the notes are concerned exclusively with the *hors-texte*. They describe the economic, performative, and spectatorial conditions of a work, as Maurice Blanchot puts it, “which will never be anything but its own holding back.” In Blanchot’s words, Mallarmé’s totalizing ambitions would condemn the poet “to give force and existence only to what is outside everything (and outside of the book, which is this everything), but thereby to discover the very center of the Book.”⁷⁷

What, then, was the *Livre*? The most concise and famous description was given by Mallarmé in an autobiographical sketch sent to Verlaine in 1885:

I have always dreamed and attempted something else, with the patience of an alchemist, ready to sacrifice all vanity and all satisfaction, the way they

⁷⁵ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 642.

⁷⁶ Jacques Scherer, *Le “Livre” de Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957, p. 85

⁷⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 225

used to burn their furniture and the beams from their ceilings, to stoke the fires of the Great Work. What would it be? It's hard to say: a book, quite simply, in several volumes, a book that would be a real book, architectural and premeditated, and not a collection of chance inspirations, however wonderful... I would even go further and say *the Book*, convinced as I am that in the final analysis there's only one, unwittingly attempted by anyone who writes, even Geniuses. The orphic explanation of the Earth, which is the poet's only duty and the literary mechanism par excellence: for the rhythm of the book, then impersonal and alive, right down to its pagination, would line up with the equations of that dream, or Ode. (D 3)

The contradictions are astounding: the "Great Work," Mallarmé insisted, would be "a book, quite simply," "a real book"; and yet, almost in the same breath as he plotted its architecture, its existence seemed to pass into the realm of hypothesis, or apotheosis: it is a book, yes, but more importantly, it is "*the Book*," one over which it would be impertinent to even claim authorship, as it has been willed "impersonally" into existence by *every* writer, not one. It would be a "dream, or Ode," yet one describable by "equations" and alive "right down to its pagination." The very description of his work as the "orphic explanation of the Earth," balanced cosmic aspiration and loss.

Like the divided status of the *Livre* for Mallarmé's legacy, the notes explained that the work itself would exist in dual form: on the one hand, as "a book, quite simply, in several volumes"; and, on the other, as a public poetic rite. In the manuscript, Mallarmé devoted himself to describing every aspect of the work's exterior—from the number of pages per volume to the physical shape of the volumes, from its publication and distribution to its financing, from the number of audience members at each performance to their seating arrangements (Figure 3.17). The physical book and the performative realization, in Mallarmé's view, were inseparable, because, as the notes insist time and again, the *Livre* consisted in demonstrating the total relationality of the whole, its

“architectural and premeditated” structure, which would be performed publically in the *séances* and privately in the act of reading the published volumes.

On the side of the published Book, with much vacillation, Mallarmé generally conceived it as a set of 20 volumes (either as 4 books subdivided into 5 volumes, or as 2 series of 10 books each).⁷⁸ Many of the notes are devoted to conceiving of a “democratic” form of publication in cheap and widely distributed editions. He envisioned an initial print run of 24,000 copies of the twenty-volume set—making an absolutely enormous total run of 480,000 volumes (OCI 584), almost inconceivable for his age. (What’s more, Mallarmé noted elsewhere with an alluring double entendre, “the edition is infinite” [OCI 609].) Each volume, Mallarmé hoped, would cost between one and three francs, making it accessible to nearly anyone, and thereby “restitute to the People in cheap editions (with my humble profit)” (OCI 564) the Book expressing their own “collective grandeur” (OCII 237).

This planned publication “à bon marché” was to be funded through a redistributive poetic economy based upon a certain number of *séances* attended by the literary elite of Paris. The price of attendance would be a “guarantee” of either 500 or 1000 francs, which would then fund the publication and distribution of the book.⁷⁹ In this way, Mallarmé conceived a literary project “founded on a financial operation—

⁷⁸ I have decided to use Arabic numerals instead of roman alphabet when discussing the calculatory dimension of the *Livre*—not only is this how the numbers appear in Mallarmé’s notes, but, since so much hinges on calculation, I believe it will make following the process easier for the reader. “20 volumes/20 séances/un volume par séance.” (OCI 610) Edouard Dujardin wrote in the *Revue de Genève* of July 25, 1886, “M Stéphane Mallarmé has begun to produce, in the face of the musical poem of Parsifal, the awaited literary and synthetic poem... The future (distant perhaps) will deliver this very vast poem that M Mallarmee is preparing... a poem in twenty volumes.” Cited in Benoit, p. 19.

⁷⁹ Mallarmé vacillated on the price. While one sheet aims for 500 fr, (OCI 584) he also wrote, “1000 francs ou 500... Sûr qu’en mettant 1000 f la place personne n’y viendra/bien obligé alors d’inviter ceux qui m’entourent de plus près.” (OCI 587)

unbeknownst to the invitees—between worldly people, but rich ones” and the crowd (“la foule”) (OCI 591).

Mallarmé imagined twenty séances, which would occur four times a year for five years, over the course of which each of the twenty volumes would be read in turn.⁸⁰ Although there is some variation in the notes, Mallarmé generally planned each volume to be made up of 24 sheets of paper, which would be performed for 24 audience members per séance, who would be seated in pairs on 12 chairs.⁸¹ The number 24 had a self-reflexive significance for Mallarmé because, first, the poet insisted that the French alphabet effectively had only twenty-four letters (omitting k and w)⁸² and, second, twenty-four is the number of syllables in an Alexandrine rhyming couplet, a fact mirrored in the seating arrangement of guests into 12 couples.⁸³ Indeed, Mallarmé insisted on the “the identity of the seating arrangement and the sheets, of the séance and the volume, of the reading and the publication,” intending each element to mirror the other, to form a single unified structure (OCI 594).

The main task of the performance would be to demonstrate “a new simultaneous method of reading” that would explode the premises of the “successive volume” bound to the “ancient and contemporary method of reading” (OCI 621) (Figure 3.18). An

⁸⁰ “Donc 20 volumes/20 séances/un volume par séance/4 Lectures chacune en cinq volumes, ans/4 Représentations concurrem[m]ent, chacune en cinq fois” (OCI 610).

⁸¹ As if things could be so simple, Mallarmé seems to have conceived of each “sheet” as a folded ensemble of 16 pages. “Il a à ce moment un nombre de feuillets égal à une moitié des sièges de l’auditoire. soit 6, et de même que ces sièges sont doubles... les feuilles se dédoublent en deux feuillets dont l’un intérieure [chaque feuillet est de 8 pages—et 3 feuillets= 24 pages].” (OCI 618)

⁸² In a fragment from 1893, Mallarmé wrote, “Avec ses vingt-quatre signes, cette Littérature exactement dénommée les Lettres, ainsi que par de multiples fusions en la figure de phrases puis le vers, système agencé comme spirituel zodiaque, implique sa doctrine propre, abstraite, ésotérique comme quelque théologie.” (OCI 624)

⁸³ He writes in one note: “un bond inouï—2 vers 24 syll/2 feuilles 12 p.” (OCI 576)

“Operator” would enter from the rear of the auditorium, walk down a central aisle with 12 audience members to either side, and advance to a “lacquered cabinet” at the front illuminated by a single electric light overhead (“sous la lampe électrique unique” [OCI 618]). The “operator” would then remove the 24 sheets of the manuscript from the cabinet’s drawers and proceed to read them and recombine them according to a chance-based system “until the exhaustion of the whole” (OCI 610). Mallarmé imagined the whole séance to last two hours, including two fifteen-minute intermissions.

In this way, through “the confrontation of a fragment of the book with itself, or a volume,” the séances would demonstrate or “prove” the total system of relations governing each aspect of the volumes (OCI 583). By running through every possible combination of pages, any one juxtaposition of which would be wholly contingent, Mallarmé would “abolish chance” precisely by rendering it into the structuring principle of the the totality. “The volume, despite its fixed publication” he wrote, “becomes by this game, *mobile*—from death it comes to life.” (OCI 619). The primary difference between the séances and the publication would be precisely this mobility: “the manuscript alone is mobile” (OCI 562) he notes, and “the sheets which are mobile for me are fixed for the *foule* into volumes” (OCI 583).

Mallarmé intended to play the role of the “Operator” himself, but not to reveal his identity as author in the séances, rendering himself anonymous, merely a reader among readers: “without revealing the author, or if not author then 1st reader... and the last one... No—the one who wrote this is Nobody—genius alone” (OCI 561). The author-as-reader would thus occupy a non-exemplary place within the ceremonial function, one comparable to a *chef d’orchestre* or, in line with the French associations of the word

“opération,” to a mathematician engaged in effectuating a “proof.”⁸⁴ As he put it, the task of the operator is “to demonstrate the scientific relations—in the discovery of the value of the book” (OCI 560-561) and “in this proof of the Crowd... I am outside—a simple reader... in order to prove that I am not alone to read in this way?—the link to the crowd as such” (OCI 585). *Le Livre* represents the apex of Mallarmé’s dream of an anonymous work of art—discussed in Chapter 2—in its reduction of the author to a manipulator of language according to a principle that radically predates his intervention and over which he has no claim as inventor. The author, in this scenario, would be nothing but, in the words of Alain Badiou, “an empty mediator” in a “ceremony of the generic.”⁸⁵

Mallarmé’s hope that this principle of anonymity, as cryptically suggested above, would secure a link to the “Crowd” was, further, bound up with reflections on genre that run throughout his notes. These speculations on the possibility of a mass subjectivity constituted by the work of art, and the concomitant necessity to reshuffle the relations between the arts (notably poetry, music, and theater) draw us inevitably to Mallarmé’s relation with *Wagnérisme*, and with his critique of the “total work of art.” That such reflections were at the core of the *Livre* from the beginning is evident in a letter to Vittorio Pica from 1886, “I believe that Literature, traced to its source, which is Art and Science, will provide a new Theater, the representations of which will be a real modern cult; *un Livre*, explanation of humanity...”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Littré—Mallarmé’s dictionary of choice—defines “opération” as “les calculs qu’il faut faire pour obtenir un résultat.”

⁸⁵ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 66; Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, New York: Verso Books, 2010, p. 150

⁸⁶ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 593

The Deconstruction of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

The French reception of Wagner had been steadily gaining ground since the Parisian debut of the overtures to *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* in January 1860. Compelled by these legendary performances, Charles Baudelaire wrote to the composer that he had been sublimely “swept up and subjugated” by the music, experiencing a “*jouissance* of comprehension, of allowing myself to be penetrated and invaded—a truly sensual pleasure, recalling that of floating through the air or rolling on the sea.”⁸⁷ And despite this, “It seemed to me,” Baudelaire wrote, “that the music was *my own*.” In this letter to the composer—to which Baudelaire appended no return address, “for that might make you think I had something to ask of you”—we find the fundamental contradiction that has occupied our discussion of the simultaneous poems: on the one hand, the oceanic experience of being overwhelmed by the work of art—the *jouissance* of being subjugated or penetrated—and, on the other, the sensation of recognizing—or, better, of reconstructing—oneself in this experience as a listener (or a reader), feeling oneself accorded a creative role in the production of the work itself.

Fifteen years later, Mallarmé published his “Richard Wagner: Reveries of a French Poet” in the August 1885 issue of *La Revue wagnérienne*, at the request of its editor Édouard Dujardin. In the journal’s first issue from February that same year (two years after the composer’s death), the editors set the tone for a movement sure of its success, yet clinging to a certain sense of embattlement: “The future, we expect, will bring the triumph of Wagner over his opposition.”⁸⁸ It continues, “For us, Richard

⁸⁷ Baudelaire, *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire*, trans and ed. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 145-46. Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta*, p. 2

Wagner's *oeuvre* dominates spectacularly; it appears living, great, strong, born to reign; it is in reality the total work of art [*l'oeuvre d'art complète*], that is not poetry, nor music, nor even visual art [*la plastique*], but that, being each together, is Drama."⁸⁹

It was precisely to this sense of *accomplishment*—in the sense of having accomplished a *completed* or *realized* art—that Mallarmé pointedly directed his reverie. Yet the precision of Mallarmé's critique of the widely celebrated premises of *Wagnérisme* was so subtle that its subversion may not have been recognized as such by the journal's editor or readers. Mallarmé, it seems, had not had the opportunity to witness a full performance of Wagner—there had been none in Paris since the explosive première of *Tannhäuser* in 1861—yet, as he wrote to Gustave Kahn the year prior to the appearance of his essay, he had fully absorbed the theoretical basis of the composer's work, in particular the notion of the “total work of art”: “I will study Wagner's book carefully, it's one of those books that I must have read, at all hours, for fifteen years, without having done so, overmuch, my nose pressed against the paper” (OCII 1622). Mallarmé was referring to the essay “La musique de l'avenir,” published in 1861 in *Quatre poèmes d'opéras traduits en prose française, précédés d'une lettre sur la musique par Richard Wagner*, which had also formed the basis of Baudelaire's research for his essay “Richard Wagner and ‘Tannhäuser’ in Paris” from the same year.

Three years before Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner* (1888), Mallarmé's serpentine prose developed a critique of Wagner that, culminating in its final paragraph, registered the depth of the French poet's ambivalence toward the composer's aspirations

⁸⁸ “Le futur—cela peut être espéré—fera triompher Wagner de ses oppositions.” Edouard Dujardin, “Chronique de Janvier,” *La Revue wagnérienne*, N1 (8 Février 1885): 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

for the unification of the Arts and of the human spirit under the guidance of German music:

That is why—Genius!—humbly enslaved to an eternal logic, O Wagner, I suffer and reproach myself, in those minutes marked by lassitude, for not being among the number of those who, bored with everything and looking for definitive salvation, go directly to the edifice of your Art, for them the endpoint of the road.... It fills the fervent all up the way to certainty: for them, it's not the biggest step that has ever been taken by a human sign, with you as a guide, but the complete progress of humanity toward an Ideal. (D 112-13).

At the primary level, Mallarmé's quarrel with the "fervent" Wagnerians such as Dujardin centered precisely on their pretension to have reached "the endpoint of the road," and to have achieved not only the progress of the "human sign," but of "humanity" itself toward the Ideal. Mallarmé showed, in his subtly ironic presentation of the Wagnerian doxa, that the teleological narrative of human progress toward an "endpoint" was always conjoined with a mythology of the "origin": "The public, with a piety that belongs to former times, first Hellenic, now German, considers the representation of origins. It sits calmly, with an odd kind of happiness, fresh and barbarous: the subtlety of the orchestration ripples the veil, and decorates the magnificence of the origin" (D 111). Mallarmé pointed to the supreme irony that Wagner should locate the progression of humanity back to its "origins" in the German national character, now draped in Athenian garb: "Yes, with the help of a harmonious compromise, calling forth a specific phase of the theater, which corresponds, as if it were a surprise, to the fundamental character of his race!" (D 111). Most fundamentally, as we shall see, Mallarmé took issue with the "compromise" itself, the "veil" of theatrical artifice that "decorates" the origin.

Mallarmé and Wagner agreed on the necessity to renew art's place in the public sphere, and to call for an end to the poet's "exclu[sion], for various reasons, from any

participations in official celebrations of beauty” (D 107). Further, Mallarmé’s *Livre* and Wagner’s “total work of art” both imagined the aesthetic as the subject of modern “ceremonies... that resides in the unconscious heart of the crowd: almost a religion!” (D 107). For Wagner, as he put it in “The Music of the Future,” the text read by Mallarmé, the goal would be to discover a form of art that would “consist in the fact that, being free from the restraint of narrow nationality, it would become universally intelligible and accessible to all nations.”⁹⁰ Wagner’s dream was that music, overcoming “that frivolous institution” of the opera, would stake a claim to this role:

If in regard to literature the attainment of this quality is hindered by the diversity of European languages, in music—the language understood by all men—we possess the great equalising power, which, resolving the language of intellectual conception into that of feeling, makes a universal communication of the innermost artistic intuitions possible, especially if this communication, by means of the plastic expression of a dramatic performance, could be raised to that distinctness which the art of painting has hitherto claimed as its exclusive privilege.⁹¹

As Wagner searched for historical instances of the “ideal relation of the theater, such as I imagined it, to public life,” he found his model in Ancient Greece:

The theatre of Athens... was only opened on days of special festivity, when the enjoyment of art was at the same time a religious celebration, in which the most distinguished men of the State took part as poets or actors, appearing like priests before the assembled populations of town and country, who were filled with such high expectations of the loftiness of the works to be performed, that Aeschylus and Sophocles could produce before them the profoundest of all poems and be certain of their appreciation.⁹²

⁹⁰ Richard Wagner, *The Music of the Future: A Letter to M. Frédéric Villot*, London: Schott & Co., 1873, p. 14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 18

Confronting the “decline of this incomparable work of art” that was the Athenian theater, Wagner argued for the reclamation of “Mythos” as “ideal subject-matter” and for the central role of Germanic music in this process.⁹³ In Wagner’s view, Germany had developed a tradition of “instrumental and choral” music that “rose to its acknowledged universal importance” in Bach and Beethoven, and that remained alien to the French and Italian opera: “the most contestable, the most equivocal public art-institution of our day.” Believing that “The most complete poetic work would therefore be that which in its ultimate perfection would resolve itself into *music*,” Wagner imagined modern German music opening onto “a vista of an ideal form [that] would extend itself before him wherein that which is imperishable in every form of art would appear freed from all fetters of what is only accidental and untrue.”⁹⁴

For Wagner, Myth, “that primitive poem of the people which we find at all times taken up and treated anew by great poets of cultivated periods,” was the medium that would allow this purging of the incidental and secure the unification of poetry and music. Myth, indeed, was the very model for the reconciliation of the abstract-universal and the particular: “in [myth] those conventional forms of human relations, explicable only to abstract reason, disappear almost entirely; and in their place stands *that* which is forever comprehensible, being purely human, but in that inimitable concrete form which gives to every genuine myth its strikingly individual character.”⁹⁵ Wagner’s revival of myth, thereby, would reconcile music’s universal (because non-linguistic) communication and the narrative specificity of epic poetry. It could do so because myth concretized the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

universal aspirations of humanity in the person of the legendary Hero, irrevocably unique and individual, yet stripped of all conventionality and contingency.

Thus, in the brief text that Mallarmé studied for his essay, Wagner proposed the reclamation of myth as the binding force that would unify not only poetry and music, but that would secure the “public” role of art; and, further, proclaimed that this achievement would represent the passing of the torch of universality from ancient Greece to modern Germany. Myth, Wagner believed, would secure the isomorphism between, on the one hand, the collectivity of audience members unified in the experience of the great work of art and, on the other hand, the synthesis of the sister arts. Both the audience and the arts would attain their individual realization only on the basis of their amalgamation in the work of art of the future. As Juliet Koss has described it, in the best recent account of Wagner’s philosophy and its relevance for modernist art,

If the various art forms were ennobled by their communal efforts to produce the Gesamtkunstwerk, so, too, were the spectator’s own senses unified and ennobled by the encounter with it. The experience of the individual spectator was likewise reproduced at a larger scale; in the presence of the total work of art, spectators discarded their own identities as individuals to become a unified audience. The process of entering the collectivity strengthened individuals’ identity precisely to the extent that it dissolved them in a larger group. Each individual art would gain its ‘full value’ in collaboration, an achievement measured... by the intensity of the overall effect produced on the spectator.⁹⁶

The characteristics that Mallarmé disputed in Wagner are already in full view: the “racial” particularity of the supposedly “universal,” the persistent emphasis on the “plastic” character of the “dramatic performance” (which is to say its status as representation), the recourse to Myth as the concrete manifestation of the universal, and

⁹⁶ Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 18

the contradictory notion that the “universal communication” of music—unhindered by the “diversity of languages”—should require the supplement of drama to realize itself.

While preserving the hope of inaugurating a new civic ritual, Mallarmé critiqued in Wagner the relationship staged between theater and music, bound together by myth. Against Wagner, Mallarmé proposed, “I imagine that the cause of going out together and assembling, in view of festivals inscribed in the human program, will not be in theater... nor music... but founding in oneself something vague and brutal that these two isolate—an Ode, dramatized or cut up knowingly... in several voices” (D 169). Mallarmé too prized what he called “the legacy of Athens,” in which theater represented the consummate public art form for the community to experience its conditions of sociability reflected on the stage. Yet he contested precisely the unification of art and society through the power of myth, the Athenian principle that Wagner sought to recover. The modern work of art, Mallarmé believed, would have to destroy all myth and deprive itself of all forms of transcendence. As he wrote, regarding the task of French art, “One century, our country, which exalts myth, dissolved them through thought, in order to make them anew! ... not fixed ones, neither ancient nor famous, but one, stripped of all personality, for it is based on our multiplicity” (D 111). Instead of the Hero of antiquity, the subject of Mallarmé’s work would be the “Mystery” of the human collectivity as such, stripped of individuality and devoted to the sheer variability of the Crowd. As James Lloyd Austin put it, “What Mallarmé envisioned for the theater of the future in France, was a sort of impersonal Myth, composing and expressing the multiple aspect of humanity in its togetherness... There would be no decor and no actors.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ James Lloyd Austin, “‘Le principal pilier’: M, Victor Hugo et Richard Wagner” in *Essais sur Mallarmé*, New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 46

The “synthesis” of Music and Theater sought by Wagner, in Mallarmé’s view, actually achieved something on the order of a “compromise” or supplementation of theatrical narrative with music as a “new evocative resource.” Rather than achieving, as Wagner would have it, the “combination of living artistic powers,”⁹⁸ Mallarmé argued that Wagner’s “Hymen” between Music and Theater prevented both music and theater from attaining “their very principle.”⁹⁹ On the one hand, theater was reduced to a “strictly allegorical” art that “needs, in order to come alive with plausibility, the life-giving flood dispensed by Music” (D 109). On the other hand, music had agreed to “a harmonious compromise” and become a mere affective supplement for “personal drama,” an emotional “veil” with which to drape the tragic hero: In Wagner, “the audience feels the impression that, were the orchestra to cease outpouring its influence, the mime would, immediately, become a statue” (D 109).

To produce an Ode “isolated” by theater and music, devoted to the impersonality of the crowd, was precisely what Mallarmé had sought in his notes on the *Livre*. From theater, Mallarmé kept the principle of publicity and presence, and from music, a model of sheer abstract relationality subtracted from any specific representational content. Regarding the latter point, Mallarmé wrote, “I employ ‘music’ in the Greek sense, to signify the Idea or the rhythm established relationally” (OCI 807). The *Livre*, he hoped, would encompass “the totality of relations existing in everything, the system otherwise known as Music” (D 210). Regarding theater, Mallarmé concurred with Wagner’s will to “public ceremony,” but sought to strip it of both its nationalistic myth of origins and its

⁹⁸ Wagner, p. 8

⁹⁹ Mallarmé wrote, “this creator’s gift for assimilation was so life-filled that, of the two elements of beauty that exclude each other, or at least remain unknown to each other, personal drama and ideal music, he brought about the Hymen.” D 110.

cathartic aim to “sweep up and subjugate” the audience (as Baudelaire put it). Instead, Mallarmé proposed a civic ritual devoted to “Mystery”: “Man and his authentic stay on earth exchange a reciprocity of proofs. / That is the Mystery. /The City, which gave, for this experience of the sacred, a theater, imprints on the earth its universal seal” (D 112). A series of questions arise: what is this “mystery,” what vision of publicness does it propose, how can it overcome the bonds of myth, and how does it relate concretely to the project of the Book?

In Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s analysis, Mallarmé’s critique of Wagner took form in *Le Livre*, which he conceived as “the *sublimation* of *mimesis*”:

[Mallarmé’s project] destines art, brought back to the strictest sense and discharged from all function subaltern or foreign to its essence, to be what the entire Occident thought it should be: the *presentation*, not of a spiritual content, to speak like Hegel, but of *the* spiritual content itself, which is nothing other than the ‘mystery’ of human existence. Be it the fact of language. This is also why this art can announce itself as the truth of religion... and *a fortiori* of all the stories, myths, and legends immemorally held by humanity about its origins and the meaning of its existence.¹⁰⁰

That is, Mallarmé’s *Livre* did not seek the *representation* of this or that particular Myth (as he accused Wagner of doing), but the *presentation* of the “truth” of Myth as such: which is to say, the conjoined “mysteries” of humanity’s collective existence—epitomized by the Crowd—and of the very fact of language—transcending any particular nation-state idiom or culture. As Lacoue-Labarthe puts it, this project sought to supersede the “representational” necessity to compel faith in any particular theatrical illusion, or identification with any particular *figure*, this tendency of which Wagner represented the historical apex:

¹⁰⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 74

Thus, [in Mallarmé's *Livre*] no faith or belief, no adhesion, is in play here (the constraint of the unknown is absolutely anterior). But rather a vertigo, facing the being-there-together. That is why the unknown is this from the very beginning, that is to say from the fact that *there exist* human beings and what binds them to the core of one community or another according to one language or another. As "Sacred Pleasure" [from *Divagations*] says, the 'function par excellence' of the crowd is to be the 'keeper of its mystery! Its own!' But this is so also as a consequence of a god, if ultimately this god is nothing but the astonishment of humans before precisely this: that there are human beings and language—nations and tongues. The incomprehensible itself.¹⁰¹

A theater directed toward "Mystery," unlike the personalization of Wagner's Hero, would, Mallarmé wrote, base itself around, "the Figure that No One is, whose rhythm, taken from the symphony, comes from the mimicking of each musical attitude, and liberates it!" (D 112). In other words, the "theater of the future," for Mallarmé, would have to liberate itself from Wagner's yoking of myth, via legend, to the individuality of the *character*.¹⁰²

Refusing "personal myth,"—in which divinity or universality is concretized in the individual and the nation—Mallarmé sought a diffusion of myth into a generic multiplicity, oriented toward the "incomprehensible" and "astonishing" fact "that there are human beings and languages—nations and tongues," as Lacoue-Labarthe put it. As he was composing his article on Wagner, he wrote to Maurice Barrès,

Ah! the 'sign par excellence' [he seems to be citing a phrase from Barrès' last letter]; but if we believe to have grasped it, we would have to be that mage known as God, whose honour is to be other than a self [*de n'être pas soi*], but in the end is reabsorbed to the pure Simple, to become again: and it is not even to the crowd of a day made whole that we must deliver the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 49

¹⁰² For Lacoue-Labarthe, Wagner's use of music to supplement the narrative capacity of theater "is the reason, above all, why he must have recourse to myth, or more exactly, to legend (the word that Baudelaire thought flattering, Mallarmé reverses the value of). Legend is what permits theater, aided by the 'orchestral attachment' to 'profit from familiars beyond the human individual.'" It thus marks the articulation, in a very precise way, between music (subordinated) and the theater (unchanged)." Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 70.

meaning of this abstruse letter (which we have drawn from the crowd, after all) but to all of humanity.¹⁰³

Likewise, but with more precision, in *Le Mystère dans les Lettres*, Mallarmé noted, “There must be something occult at the bottom of everyone, I believe decidedly in something abstruse, signifying sealed and hidden, that inhabits the commons” (D 231).¹⁰⁴ Mallarmé’s vision, thus, seemed to operate in the tradition of the Jansenist “hidden god” or *deus absconditus*—a divinity “always absent and always present” as Lucien Goldmann describes Pascal’s belief.¹⁰⁵ But in Mallarmé’s view, the “divine” is precisely what is human, yet “other than a self,” which is to say, the multiplicity of languages and communities: “a force that can be located nowhere but in the psychic plane of the collectivity,” as Tzara put it.

In the letter to Barrès, further, Mallarmé linked this diffuse divinity with the absence of a “sign par excellence,” which is to say, with the principle of contingency governing language as such. If language, for Mallarmé, exemplified the “mystery” of human community, it did so precisely because of the fact which, for Wagner, barred its access to universality: “the diversity of... languages.” We can recall here Mallarmé’s assertion in “Crisis of Verse” that “The diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from proffering words that would otherwise be, when made uniquely, the material truth” (D 205-6) Rather than pining for a “resplendent word” that would unite the signifier and signified, Mallarmé wrote that if such a transcendent reconciliation were possible, “be aware that *verse would not exist*: it philosophically, makes up for language’s deficiencies,

¹⁰³ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 581-2.

¹⁰⁴ Yves Bonnefoy connects this passage with the letter to Barrès in *Ibid.*, ft. 2 p. 581

¹⁰⁵ Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, Trans. Philip Thody, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 36

as a superior supplement” (D 205-6). That is to say, in Mallarmé’s view, poetry could be defined as the inassimilable excess produced by the originary flaw of human language, its exile from the ground of being. By way of a dialectical reversal, he proposed that the arbitrariness of words—their innate “deficiency”—did not consign language to untruth, but rather, rendered to poetry the task of expressing the radical truth of total contingency.

Without myth, without representation, and without audience identification, *Le Livre*, therefore, aimed to “convoke the public” in its abstract generality, to produce an ode to “the unconscious heart of the Crowd,” “the Figure that No One is” by demonstrating and activating the “mobility” of language, its abstract “musical” relations (D 112). If language could speak this condition of pure being-together for a radically democratic and atheistic public, it would not be through the particularity of the national idiom nor through the reconciliation of the divine *logos*. Rather, the poet would have only to discover the extent to which language itself, the very medium of human connectivity, resembled the collective participation in a highly structured, yet ever-evolving, game of chance.

Simultaneity against Totality

Wagnerism was evidently on Tristan Tzara’s mind in 1921, as he remarked in a letter sent from Bavaria, near the Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein Castles. Tzara ruminated on his location, in the shadows of Neuschwanstein, built by Ludwig II, patron of Wagner: “I’ve received your letter in Hohenschwangau, this location infused with grotesque and formless memories of a mad king and of Wagner, where I’m able with each step to recognize the point at which these global false glories still find in France a

noxious influence” (TOCI 417). Tzara continued, placing the works of the contemporary avant-garde in the meretricious legacy of Wagner:

From symbolism to instrumentalism, from orphism to paroxysm, from futurism to all the etcetera-isms that blend music and poetry, the singularly primitive idea of a “universal art” has tormented the spirit of our writers and left stains of Wagnerian bouillabaisse, this mysterious but diffuse sensibility that M. M. Barrès discusses in *l’Ennemi des Lois*. (TOC I 417)¹⁰⁶

In this avant-gardist “bouillabaisse,” Tzara precisely targeted the Wagnerian synthesis of the arts as it became intertwined with the legacy of Symbolism. In addition to the more well known “orphisme” of Apollinaire, Delaunay, and Kupka, and the forgotten “Paroxysme” of Nicolas Beauduin, Tzara names Instrumentalism, or *instrumentisme*, which, as Henri Béhar reminds us, referred to René Ghil’s poetic theory of “verbal instrumentation” developed in his *Le Traité du verbe* of 1888 (given a famous preface by Mallarmé) and its theoretical commentary, the *Méthode Évolutive-Instrumentiste* published in the *Revue Indépendante* in 1889.¹⁰⁷ Ghil, for his part, wrote that while he was too “materialist and evolutionist” to subscribe fully to Wagner’s work, Dujardin’s *Revue wagnérienne* “surely helped me, who, according to Mallarmé ‘writes more like a composer than a *littérateur*’ ..., with tonal quality in ‘verbal insturmentation’, with the genesis and action of the *leitmotiv*, the orchestral construction and general harmonization,

¹⁰⁶ In *l’Ennemi des lois*, Barrès recounts Ludwig II’s invitation of Wagner to his court in 1864, as one of the first acts of his reign: “Ce sont probablement les instants les plus intenses de sa vie toute consacrée à chercher le bonheur. Au contact de celui en qui il avait personifié son idéal, son énergie lui fit illusion; il put croire qu’avec cet homme il accomplirait des choses sublimes, et il se donnait avec d’autant plus d’âpreté à ce vainqueur que par cette dilection singulière il affirmait son moi contre son entourage.” Maurice Barrès, *l’Ennemi des lois*, Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1898, pp. 207-208.

¹⁰⁷ On the differentiation between Ghil, Gustave Kahn, and Mallarmé in the prehistory of Futurist *parole en liberté*, see Robert Michael Brain, “Genealogy of ‘Zang Tumb Tumb’: Experimental Phonetics, *Vers Libre*, and Modernist Sound Art,” *Grey Room* 43 (Spring 2011): 88-117. *Paroxysme* refers to the poetic “school” outlined by Nicolas Beauduin, popularized in the 1911 publication of Henry Maassen’s “*La Poésie paroxyste*,” Liège: Editions de la sauterelle verte, 1911.

the interpenetration of parts, the evolving equilibrium of measure and rhythm.”¹⁰⁸ Tzara was at pains to differentiate the Dada project from this sort of musico-poetic hybridization that spread in the wake of symbolism and that flew the banner of “Wagnerian universal art.”

The most pressing target for Tzara was the “simultanéisme” of Henri Barzun, a former colleague of the *Section d’Or* Cubist circle around the Abbaye de Créteil. Indeed, in the “note pour les bourgeois,” Tzara cites Barzun’s *Voix, Rythmes et Chants Simultanés* (1913) as an example of the modern goal to “seek a narrow relation between the polyrhythmic symphony and poetry” (TOCI 492). Barzun described the invention of a new form of “vocal orchestration” or “verbal instrumentation” “to create this modern art of simultaneous voices and songs, a Poly-Hymnal art, a new and liberating art.”¹⁰⁹ In this way, “simultaneous rhythm will allow ... the recreation of form, from the *odelette*, the elegy, the prayer, right up to the great poem and the epic.”¹¹⁰ Tzara wrote in the “Note...” that “the intention to complicate and deepen this technique into a universal drama by exaggerating its value to the point of conferring upon it a new ideology and enclosing it within the exclusivism of an academy—failed.” (TOCI 492). Tzara’s association of these developments with the legacy of Wagnerism and “universal art,” I will argue, suggests a rapprochement between the Dada simultaneous poetry and Mallarmé’s “deconstruction of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”

In fact, it turns out that a highly ambiguous form of Wagnerism mediated the very formulation of the simultaneous poem in the hands of the co-founder of Dada, Hugo Ball.

¹⁰⁸ Ghil, *Les Dates et les oeuvres*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ Barzun, *Voix, Rythmes et Chants Simultanés* Paris: Mercure de France, 1913, p. 32

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Placing the variety of Dada activities under the sign of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Ball wrote in his diary on April 8th, 1917, “I have realized a favorite old plan of mine. Total art: pictures, music, dances, poems—now we have that.”¹¹¹ The previous evening, he had delivered his famous lecture on Wassily Kandinsky from 1917, in which he situated the painter in a great lineage only one generation separated from Wagner: “Kandinsky means liberation, solace, redemption and peace... Kandinsky is one of the great innovators, purifiers of life. The vitality of his intent is astounding and just as extraordinary as Rembrandt’s was for his age, as Wagner’s also for his, a generation ago. His vitality embraces equally music, dance, drama, and poetry.”¹¹²

Kandinsky, for Ball, furthered the Wagnerian goal of the synthesis of the arts, nowhere more forcefully than in his synesthetic theater piece *The Yellow Sound* [*Der gelbe Klang*], first published in the *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* in 1912. Ball had been aware of the work since at least 1914 in Munich, when he was in correspondence with Kandinsky.¹¹³ In his lecture, Ball proclaimed that this work exceeded even the Futurists, and that “[Kandinsky] was the first to discover and apply the most abstract expression of sound in language, consisting of harmonized vowels and consonants.”¹¹⁴ Drawing on Kandinsky’s essay “On Stage Composition,” Ball wrote,

In *Der Blaue Reiter*, Kandinsky wrote a critique of the Wagnerian ‘*Gesamtkunstwerk*’ advocating the monumental art work of the future. Such externalization, he insisted, serves only to intensify, emphasize, and

¹¹¹ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, p. 104

¹¹² “His significance rests on the fact that his initiative is equally practical and theoretical. He is the critic of his own work and of his epoch. He is a writer of incomparable verses, author of some of the most spiritual books in recent German literature.” *Ibid.*, pp. 226-27.

¹¹³ See his letter of June 26 and Kandinsky’s reply in Hugo Ball, *Hugo Ball: 1886-1986*, ed. Ernst Taubner, Berlin: Publica, 1986, p. 90-91

¹¹⁴ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, p. 234.

reinforce expression, while contradicting the intrinsic laws of the arts involved. Kandinsky's idea of a monumental stage composition is based on opposite premises. He envisages a counter-positioning of the individual arts, a symphonic composition in which every art, reduced to its essentials, provides as an elementary form no more than the score for a construction or composition of the stage. Such a composition would allow each individual art its own material mode of operation, and it would create the future monumental work of art from a blend of the refined materials.¹¹⁵

As Ball noted, "externalization" and "intensification" were the key terms of Kandinsky's interpretation of Wagner. Kandinsky affirmed Wagner's critique of the opera as a form to which music remains merely "external," because "opera is drama to which music has been added as the principle element... the two parts are connected only externally." Wagner's critique of opera, Kandinsky continued, sought "to connect the parts organically and in this way to create a monumental work."¹¹⁶

However, for Kandinsky, Wagner's "mistake was to believe that he had a universal method at his command. Actually his method is only one of a series of even more powerful possibilities of monumental art." Kandinsky argued, like Mallarmé, that Wagner conceived music as a force with which to augment thematic development and affect:

In the same artistic but still external fashion, Wagner subordinated the music to the libretto, that is, to the movement in a broad sense. He represented musically the hissing of glowing iron in water, the beating of a hammer in the smithy, etc.... On the one hand Wagner increased the effect of one method, and on the other hand he decreased the inner sense, the purely artistic inner meaning of the auxiliary method.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹¹⁶ Kandinsky, "On Stage Composition," *The Blue Rider Almanac*, New York: Viking Press, 1974, p. 194-5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Kandinsky contended, “[Music] should never be externally subordinated to the action,” and nor should the other “complex of inner experiences (soul= vibrations) of the audience” such as dance or color. In his view, each element should gain a certain independence and mutually supporting autonomy (a view ultimately not dissimilar to Wagner’s own aims, it must be said). The means by which Kandinsky sought to synthesize these “external” elements of theater, to make them “interior,” was by emphasizing the possibility of using the human voice for its purely abstract sound-generating potential: “The word, independent or in sentences, was used [in *The Yellow Sound*] to create a certain ‘atmosphere’ that frees the soul and makes it receptive. The sound of the human voice was also pure, i.e., without being obscured by words, or by the meaning of words.”¹¹⁸

“In *Der Gelbe Klang*,” Ball wrote, Kandinsky “was the first to discover and apply the most abstract expression of sound in language, consisting of harmonized vowels and consonants.”¹¹⁹ In Kandinsky’s theater proposals, then, Ball would have encountered a model for abstraction to operate at the level of vocal sound as well as image, and thereby to attain a degree of purity: “The whole secret of Kandinsky is his being the first painter to reject—also more radically than the cubists—everything representational as impure, and to go back to the true form, *the sound of a thing*, its essence...”¹²⁰

Ball attempted to follow up on Kandinsky’s link between the legacy of Wagnerian “monumental theater” and the liberation of pure vocal sound in his *Verse ohne Worte*,

¹¹⁸ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, p. 206.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226 (my emphasis). Ball also noted, “Cubism operates with grammar, Kandinsky with flexible inner necessity.” *Ibid.* p. 230

which he premièred at the Cabaret Voltaire on June 23rd, 1916 (Figure 3.19). Standing before the audience in the “cubist costume” he designed with Janco, Ball read a manifesto: “We must return to the innermost alchemy of the word, we must even give up the word too, to keep for poetry its last and holiest refuge.”¹²¹ Ball read his fractured poetry where phonemes are organized into precarious and primitivizing compounds and found, on the one hand, that he was “taking on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation” and, on the other hand, that the reduction of the word to “pure sound” mimicked the process of secularization in which “Man lost his divine countenance, became matter, chance, an aggregate.”¹²²

For Ball, the intensity of this poetic destruction of language earned its place in the German tradition of the “superlative” “with Kleist, Wagner, and Nietzsche” in which “causing a sensation has been the means of breaking out of the syllogistic prison of the Enlightenment and of diverting public attention from the academy.”¹²³ Yet this anti-rationalist tradition, which sought to break open the prison house of language and subjugate the intellect under waves of overwhelming sensation, threatened to deliver the artist over to the “demonic.”¹²⁴ Breaking with Dada, Ball wrote to Tzara on September 27th, 1916,: “The Cabaret Voltaire is useless, bad, decadent, militaristic.... No more ‘blasphemy’, no more ‘irony’ (that is filthy, vulgar), no more satire (who has the right to

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 71; 223-24. For an in depth treatment of Ball’s relation to secularization, and his shifting political and theological alignments, see my essay “‘Complexio Oppositorum’: Hugo Ball and Carl Schmitt,” *October* 146 (Fall 2013): 31-64

¹²³ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, p. 79

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

do so?), no more ‘intelligentsia’... Enough of it! *Écrasez!*”¹²⁵ The following year, on April 15th, 1918, having abandoned art and poetry and embarked upon a career as a political journalist and Catholic theorist, Ball sought to distinguish himself one last time from the Wagnerian tradition: “The cult of the titan and the superlative are found in the young Goethe (Prometheus, Faust), Kleist (Penthesilea), Wagner (the Siegfried myth), Hebbel (Holofernes), and Nietzsche (Superman)... The heart of the poet is always with the titan, even if he is defeated. Titanic and anti-Christian, however, count as the same.”¹²⁶ For Ball, Dada poetic performance, therefore, teetered perilously along the fault line between the “superlative” tradition of sensory bombardment and its “anti-Christian” or “demonic” tendencies.

Yet, in Dada’s early days, Ball attempted to reconcile these contradictions through his own simultaneous poem, staged at the Cabaret Voltaire’s “*Große Soirée*” on May 30th, 1916—two months after “*L’amiral cherche...*” and one month before Ball’s “magic priest” performance. Entitled *Ein Krippenspiel. Bruiistisch*, elsewhere called the “*Simultan Krippenspiel*,” this curiously understudied performance oriented both the Wagnerian synthesis of the arts and the potential of non-semantic sound toward the performance of the Christian nativity myth (Figure 3.20). This “*concert bruite*,” as he elsewhere called it, featured Ball, Hennings, Tzara, Arp, Janco, and the singer Marietta di Monaco acting in a highly abridged account of the birth of Christ enacted through an array of abstract sounds. The parts for Joseph, Mary, and the three kings are on equal sonic footing with parts for “The Wind,” “Sheep,” or “Light Apparatus,” each consisting

¹²⁵ Ball, “104. An Tristan Tzara [September 27, 1916],” in Hugo Ball, *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 1, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003, pp. 128–29.

¹²⁶ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, p. 150

almost totally of onomatopoeic sounds. In fact, the most substantial lines delivered in recognizable words consist of Joseph greeting the three kings with repeated “Bonsoir, messieurs” and “Parlez-vous français, messieurs?” which are responded to with phonetic outbursts “Ah, eh, ih, ohm, uh, ah, eh, ih, oh, uh! aih, auhh, euhhh, eh ih, oh uhhhh! Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” essentially dramatizing the plight of the listener in the face of Dada para-linguistic poetry. Finally, the whole play was to be accompanied by an amazing array of sounds made by, as Ball specifies in a handwritten note on the text, whips, foghorns, ocarina, straw, chains, trumpet, and “copper devices.” Despite the racket, Ball emphasized in his diary that the poem elicited an atmosphere of solemnity and sincerity from the usually raucous audience, far from the “demonic” effects sought by Tzara:

Annemarie [Ball’s daughter with Emmy Hennings] was allowed to come with us to the soirée. She went wild over all the colors and the frenzy. She wanted to get up on the stage and ‘perform something too.’ We had a hard time holding her back. The ‘Krippenspiel’ [Nativity Play] (bruitist concert accompanying the evangelical text) had a gentle simplicity that surprised the audience. The ironies had cleared the air. No one dared to laugh. One would hardly have expected that in a cabaret, especially in this one. We welcomed the child, in art and in life.¹²⁷

Ball and Tzara’s conflicting formulations of the simultaneous poem, then, replay the divided legacy of the nineteenth century dream of reclaiming the social role for art under the aegis of ritual, epitomized by the conflict between Wagner and Mallarmé. Ball sought to extend the Mallarméan dissemination of language, to renew the aspiration toward aesthetic synthesis, and to employ art to redeem the unmooring of meaning caused by the death of God. While Mallarmé and Ball both recognized the precariousness and contingency of human language, Ball insisted that such conditions were signs of a

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

fallen humanity awaiting divine redemption. The Dada poem would, in this view, prepare the ground for the “re-divinization” of the word against the progressive secularization effected by the bourgeoisie, whose calculating spirit debased all “higher values”: “We have loaded the word with strengths and energies that helped us to rediscover the evangelical concept of the ‘word’ (*logos*) as a magical complex image.”¹²⁸ Ball’s search for the linguistic absolute, however, did not only ritualize the destruction of language, but, in the *Krippenspiel*, thematized it and sought to couch it in the cradle of Christianity’s origin myth.

In this way, Ball is at antipodes from the fundamental insight of Mallarmé’s critique of Wagner: that the structure of ritual could only be made to function again if self-consciously emptied of all claims to transcendence. Mallarmé’s hope that “some day a magnificence will unfold, seeming like nothing, analogous to the Shadow of long ago,” (D 247) made explicit that any future ceremony would be barred access to the absolute, especially in the form of the Christian God, “that old and evil plumage, now happily defeated.”¹²⁹

Mallarmé’s desire to revive a “cult” for the aesthetic cannot be wholly conflated with the idea that art should now serve the socially integrative function that religion once had, nor with the notion that art has always been, at bottom, religious. Rather, it is perhaps more accurate to say that, for Mallarmé, religion had obscured the true object of its rituals, its true “mystery,” which was “the latent and forever abstruse contained in the presence of the crowd” (D 247). What remained after the destruction of the content of myth and mimesis—from Athens to the Catholic Mass—was a mode of presentation

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 68

¹²⁹ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 342

without substance, given the task of making the crowd present to itself, and of thereby revealing “the meaning latent in the concurrence of everyone” (D 111). Against “the inaptitude of people to perceive their nothingness if not as a hunger, profane poverty, apart from the accompaniment of the absolute thundering of the organs of death,” Mallarmé’s hope was for art to reveal to this void to the crowd, “the keeper of its mystery! Its own!” In this way, stripping away the “veils” of religion, what remained was not the Hero nor the irreducible human individual, but the structures of community and communication deprived of any origin. In the absence of a primordial ground of meaning, all that remained were the vain, but fundamentally human acts of conjoining words and people. In the absence of a beyond—“*il n’y a pas de au-delà*,” Mallarmé affirmed—we write, we gather, and we struggle to make meaning: there is nothing else: “nothing will have taken place but the place, except, perhaps, a constellation.”

Needless to say, *Le Livre* remained unrealized—or perhaps unrealizable. Failure was written into it from the beginning, by dint of Mallarmé’s refusal to address any actually existing public, and, instead, to orient his poetry toward “The meaning latent in the concurrence of everyone.” Mallarmé wagered his work on the future emergence of a public that would discover their very conditions of sociability in the most minor and disseminated language. Seeking to present the pure multiplicity of the human collectivity, bereft of any mimetic or mythic “veil,” Mallarmé exiled the individual artist from the Work just as much as the wagnerian “Hero.” Facing the conditions of impossibility for his absolutization of art, Mallarmé wrote, “Uninformed are those who would proclaim themselves their own contemporaries. There’s no such thing as a Present, no—a present doesn’t exist... For lack of the Crowd’s declaring itself” (D 218).

From one perspective, Mallarmé's dream of a "simultaneous form of reading" set against every form of personal drama seemed to be realized on the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire. This point of view was expressed by Benjamin, who wrote, "Dada shows the contemporary relevance of what Mallarmé, monadically, in his hermetic room, had discovered..."¹³⁰ And yet, just eighteen years after Mallarmé's death, his vision of the poem as a ritual addressed to a human collectivity subtracted from any given particularity, must have seemed irredeemably lost if not grown obscene in the shadow of the war. As Tzara put it in his first Dada Manifesto, "DADA remains in the frame of European weakness, it's all shit, but from now on, we want to shit in diverse colors to decorate the zoological garden of art with all the consulates' flags" (TOCI 357). In the Dada simultaneous poems, the redemptive quality of Mallarmé's ceremony collapsed, on the one hand, into the reigning conditions of geo-political division along linguistic lines, and on the other, into a form of contingency with no utopian significance, only a lived sense of the precariousness and instability of the social fabric. Tzara and his collaborators retained only the negativity of Mallarmé's poetics, using the simultaneous poem to stage a ritual of dis-identification, a performance of mutually assured linguistic destruction.

¹³⁰ Walter Benjamin "Attested Auditor of Books," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and other writings on media*, Eds. Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA, 2008, p. 171.

Chapter Four

An Idle Chance: Risk, Work, and Money in Marcel Duchamp's *Monte Carlo Bond*

La vie à credit
—Marcel Duchamp, “Notes” (DDS 396)

“I’m working,” Marcel Duchamp assured Jacques and Gaby Villon, his brother and sister-in-law, in a letter from Monte Carlo dated June 9th, 1925.¹ It may have struck even the Villons as odd that Duchamp would evoke “work” on his trip to the gambling capital of Monaco, where wealthy Europeans have historically gone to escape the banality of their business affairs by leaving their fortunes to fortune. Duchamp’s visit to the casinos of Monte Carlo, he emphasized in his letter, was suffused neither with glamor nor with the thrill of the gamble. Instead, he was playing the roulette tables with the detachment of the scientist, limiting his bets to small sums, and studying his fellow gamblers: “I saw a guy who’s dealing with the same system as me, but with more experience and I am proceeding very carefully.” He continued,

In all likelihood, I have the intention of playing experimentally (viz. at least 10 or 20 francs) for 3 months—so that I can embark upon my ‘bankruptcy’ [*faillite*] with certainty next winter or later still if the experiment isn’t conclusive enough. I’ll have become a supra-dealer [*surcroupier*]. I have more patience and stubbornness than the ivory ball.

In his letter, Duchamp adopted a tone of stubborn dedication to the *longue durée* of

“work” in the casinos: applying a gambling “system” with methodical persistence,

¹ Thank you to Antoine Monnier and the Association Marcel Duchamp, who have generously shared two never before published letters from their archives, sent from Monte Carlo by Marcel Duchamp to Jacques and Gaby Villon, dated June 9th 1925 and June 16th 1915. In French, the letter reads, “Je travaille j’ai vu un type qui s’occupe du même système que moi avec beaucoup plus d’expérience et je vais très doucement. j’ai vraisemblablement l’intention de jouer expérimentalement (c.à.d. au minimum 10 ou 20 francs) pendant les 3 mois—afin de ne m’embarquer dans ma ‘faillite’ qu’à coup sûr l’hiver prochain ou plus tard encore si l’expérience n’est pas assez concluante J’aurais fait un surcroupier. J’ai plus de patience et d’entêtement que la bille d’ivoire.”

observing the strategies of those with more experience, carefully betting only small amounts, and planning return visits should his “experiment” require it. In the process, he described merging his subjectivity with the two avatars of indifference in the game: on the one hand, he sought to assimilate himself to the cold circularity of the roulette ball, tossed against the slipstream of the wheel; and, on the other hand, Duchamp locked his sights on the one person who plays roulette with total detachment, the *croupier*, who oversees the bank secure in the knowledge that any sequences of wins or losses averages out, universally, to a house advantage. In this letter, Duchamp alternated between shrugging lack of concern regarding his own impending bankruptcy and exultant desire to become a *surcroupier*, a neologism with overtones of the Nietzschean “*surhomme*.”²

Writing to the Villons a week later on June 16th, Duchamp’s spirits seem to have dampened somewhat:

Roulette: Equality, I’m dabbling in equality with a desperate slowness— It’s a form of office work. But I’m doing badly__ Anyway, if I play for 3 months without winning or losing, I would consider that result remarkable in itself, although insufficient.³

In one week he has passed from stubborn patience to desperate slowness, from the affirmation “*je travaille*” to the resignation of the pencil pusher, from a jocular embrace

² Gabrielle Buffet recalled that Stirner and Nietzsche were Francis Picabia’s favorite authors in the years of his closest association with Duchamp. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia *Rencontres*, Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1977, p. 37. Cited in Francis Naumann *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life, and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp*, New York: Readymade Press, 2012, p. 356. Duchamp later noted that he read Nietzsche in French translation but understood little of it: “I didn’t understand a world of Nietzsche at the time I read it, neither do I today, because it is beyond me what he said. You have to make a study of it, I suppose you’ve got to read it in the original German to get it. ... So from my French translation I could not make out head or tail.” Unpublished Interview with Harriet and Carroll Janis, with the participation of Sidney Janis, NY, 1953, cited in Naumann, *Ghost*, p. 357-8.

³ “Roulette: Egalité, je barbotte dans l’égalité avec une lenteur désespérante—C’est bien du travail de bureau. Mais j’en prends à mauvaise—Si d’ailleurs je jouais 3 mois sans gagner ni perdre, je considérerais le résultat déjà remarquable quoique pas suffisant.”

of bankruptcy to an anxious sense that he is “doing badly,” and from the sublation of the croupier to a patently insufficient hope of breaking even.

The notion of “equality” as a central principle of Duchamp’s Monte Carlo gambling, further, approached the status of tautology. Gambling is based on the hope of profiting without producing, of being rewarded for the willingness to risk one amount of money by its multiplication as it passes through the medium of chance. Duchamp, conversely, played at the roulette table with a pose of disinterest in the prospects of winning or losing, hoping in the end to achieve a “remarkable” “equality” between the two. In this, Duchamp resembled the hypothetical capitalist that Marx described performing the “tautological” act of exchanging £100 for cotton and then exchanging this same cotton for £100 elsewhere, “a roundabout way of exchanging money for money, the same for the same... an operation as purposeless as it is absurd.”⁴ The only reason a capitalist goes to the market to exchange money for money is to produce a difference, because if it is equality that is sought, it would be wiser to simply hold on to the £100; unlike the shopper who goes to market to acquire objects for use (trading a commodity for money in order to acquire a different use-value: C-M-C), the capitalist buys and sells indifferent to qualitative differences in use-values, seeking only a quantitative gain in the amount of money (M-C-M’).⁵ If Duchamp’s “dabbling in equality”—his playing for the “remarkable result” of risking a given sum in order to regain the same sum—is “absurd and empty” for the capitalist, as Marx puts it, it is arguably even more so for the gambler at the roulette table.⁶ Poker, for example, is a game with enough qualitative appeal to play

⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, Trans Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 251

⁵ See the discussion of the “general formula of capital in *Ibid.*, pp. 247-257.

for its own sake, but roulette admits only quantitative ends, with no aim but gain, and the idea of playing without money stakes is no more imaginable than doing office work just for fun. Duchamp's gambling, then, appears as a roundabout way to produce a perfect nullity, not unlike the circularity of the ivory ball or the spinning wheel.

The goal of this chapter is to advance a theory about the relation of art, chance and work for Duchamp, and their mediation in money. It will center on the most immediate result of Duchamp's trip to the casino: the letterpress print and photo-collage known as the *Monte Carlo Bond (L'Obligation de Monte Carlo)* (Figure 4.1), produced in Winter 1924. The stated purpose of its production and sale was to raise capital to fund Duchamp's deployment of a "system" for playing roulette. He initially intended to sell 30 *Monte Carlo Bonds*, but it seems that only eight were produced—and even fewer sold. And the nature of the "sale," what it meant to purchase one of the works, was precisely one of its greatest paradoxes: on the one hand, it is a limited-edition print and artwork; on the other, it was made, quite seriously it seems, as a bearer bond, a financial document entitling its purchaser to be paid interest on their investment. The work's commodity-status, thus, fluctuates without resolution. If a work of art, it is purchased from the artist for a set price of 500F, from which Duchamp draws his profit and for which the collector gains an object with a use-value (contemplation, pleasure, or cultural capital) and an exchange value that appreciates or depreciates depending on the vagaries of the artist's reputation within the art market. If a bond, it is a contract between a debtor (Marcel Duchamp) and a creditor (the holder of the bond), in which the latter loans the former a principal of 500F for the right to be paid interest at a certain rate (20% in the case of Duchamp's bond) plus the return of the initial loan at a certain date (when the bond

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 248

reaches “maturity”). The debtor is willing to pay interest for temporary access to the creditor’s capital, in order to invest it in turn (typically into commodity-production) with the hope of making enough money to pay back the debt, the interest, and make a tidy profit of their own.

These two modes entail radically different aesthetic, economic and power relations between buyer and seller, yet they are fused in this one object, in which the artist is both source of aesthetic value and indebted man, and the buyer is both collector and creditor. Yet, either way, Duchamp planned to gamble away these funds in Monte Carlo by “dabbling in equality” at the roulette table. From the vantage point of the 21st century, when debt drives the global financialization of market and non-market entities alike and when works of art sit sheltered from taxes in the storage vaults of the Geneva Freeport as an imagined bedrock of value impervious to economic crisis, it is difficult to gauge the stakes of Duchamp’s gesture, which deftly brushes aside the binary of critique or complicity.⁷

This chapter considers the *Monte Carlo Bond* as an object advancing an aesthetic proposition, as a means to engage in “experimental” work on chance, and as a financial instrument. As such, the *Bond* reformulates a nexus of concerns that are at the heart of Duchamp’s work, and which this chapter will take up in turn: the dialectical struggle of the human intellect against the ubiquity of the aleatory; the status of work in capitalism, its crystallization into money, and the conception of art as a form of “lazy action” set against both; and the precarious futurity of the avant-garde work of art, a temporality

⁷ On the freeport in the international art market, see Hito Steyerl, “Duty-Free Art,” *e-flux* n. 63 (March 2015): <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/duty-free-art/>

always haunted by failure.⁸ As I will demonstrate, each of these problems were allegorized for Duchamp at the roulette table.

These were also, as we have seen, the abiding concerns of Mallarmé's life. If Duchamp could proclaim in the 1940s that "Mallarmé was a great figure. This is the direction in which art should turn," then this chapter marks also the culmination of the process traced in this dissertation.⁹ This was the process whereby the terms of Mallarmé's poetics were internalized by a generation of artists, stretching from cubism through to Dada, that recovered aspects of his aesthetic thought that had been obscured by his Symbolist and Impressionist peers. The work that Duchamp produced from the *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913, to his first readymades in New York around 1915-1916, were, I will argue, formed by a direct engagement with Mallarmé's thought about the relation of chance to language, evinced in Duchamp's notes on *Un Coup de Dés* from 1915.

In *Un Coup de Dés*, further, the image of the throw of the dice not only expressed the fate of any thought expressed in language—"Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés"—but also the uncertain status of the work of art in modernity, an age in which the organic connection to tradition had ruptured and the social order securing a new place for the artist in the community had not yet arrived. In this "interregnum," Mallarmé proposed, the creation of poetry or art of any sort appears as a desperate act of tossing dice "into eternal circumstances," a kind of "madness" in which the artist wagers on a future reception that may never occur, consigning their lives to a "legacy in disappearance/ to

⁸ "Lazy action" is a term used by the Italian economist Maurizio Lazzarato in his essay on work and Duchamp. He writes, "Lazy action is at the antipodes of capitalism, in which the ends (money) are everything and process nothing," in *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2014, p. 40.

⁹ James Johnson Sweeney, "Conversation with Marcel Duchamp: Eleven Europeans in America," *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, V. 13, n. 4-5 (1946): p. 21.

someone/ ambiguous/ the ulterior immemorial demon” (OCI 374). The creative act, for Mallarmé, is a potentially “empty act” staked on “an idle chance” (*une chance oiseuse*) of realizing a “supreme conjunction with probability” and “fusing with the beyond” (OCI 374, 387). The singular cunning presented in Duchamp’s *Monte Carlo Bond* was to convert Mallarmé’s vision of the poem as a cosmic wager on a future reception into the “idle chance” of the gambler or speculator. In Duchamp’s singularly annihilating vision of the restricted possibilities of art under capitalism, the “unimportant play of art in society” is a “habit-forming drug” that “has absolutely no existence as such, as veracity or truth of any kind,” “like roulette, or like a drug as I said before.”¹⁰

The Bond and the Martingale

Duchamp issued his *Obligation de Monte Carlo (Monte Carlo Bond)* on November 1st, 1924. The letterpress print and photocollage is a hybrid that mimics precisely the visual and legal conventions of financial bonds, of which Duchamp must have been quite aware, being the son of a notary public. More specifically, it is a bearer bond (“*obligation au porteur*” as it is written on the front of the work), a legal agreement that did not require the owner to register it with the bank or government, and that could be traded and spent like paper money. Under the aegis of a joint-stock company, signed by the “President of the Administrative Council” Rose Sélavy and her “Administrator” Marcel Duchamp, the bond was designed to borrow 15,000 francs of capital, divided into 30 numbered bonds of 500 frs. each (although, again, Duchamp only produced about 8).

¹⁰ Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*, Brooklyn: Badlands Unlimited, 2013, p. 55-57.

Put into circulation, the bonds were authenticated with a stamp as a “quittance,” numbered and initialed “RS,” that validated it as legal tender.

On the reverse of the bond, Duchamp included the statutes of the company, and some basic information about its aims:

Art. 1 – The goal of the company is:

1: Exploitation of Roulette in Monte Carlo under the conditions listed below.

2: Exploitation of *Trente et quarante* and other mines in the Côte d’Azur according to the deliberation of the Administrative Council.

Art. 2 – The annual payment is based upon a cumulative system [*système à montant*], experimentally tested through 100,000 rolls of the ball, which is exclusive property of the Administrative Council

The application of this system to even odds [*aux chances simples*] will allow the payment of a dividend of 20%

Art. 3 – The Company is entitled, after the deliberation of the General Assembly, to buy back all or part of these bonds within a month of the date of the decision.

Art. 4 – The payment of the coupons will be made on the 1st of March annually or bi-annually, at the discretion of the bondholder.

To summarize, Duchamp’s bond or debt security offered its investors the right to be paid a fixed interest rate of 20% on the initial investment (or principal) of 500 frs per year, for three years, which would amount to 100 frs of interest a year. It was to be paid in 12 installments of 25 frs, collectable, as with all bearer bonds, by clipping the coupons that run down the side of the document and presenting them to the company or an authorized agent bank for payment. After the bond reached “maturity” in three years, the investor would have made 300 frs. interest and be entitled to the return of their “principal” of 500 frs. The payments were due to the bondholders whether or not Duchamp made a profit; therefore, both lender (Doucet, for example) and borrower (Duchamp) shouldered the risk of loss in the case of bankruptcy.

Bearer bonds, because they did not need to be registered to a specific owner or listed on a bond directory, and because interest would be paid to anyone possessing a coupon, were a common target for theft and a preferred medium for criminals and defrauders. As though to assure potential investors of the authenticity of his bond, Duchamp went through the trouble of printing decorative anti-forgery script along the bottom and left-hand side of the bond. This standard device typically displayed the name of the company in elaborately calligraphic print to discourage counterfeiters, but Duchamp's script is illegible and fragmentary (by now almost a century of Duchampiana has failed to decipher it) and was likely appropriated from another document.¹¹ Duchamp deployed another anti-forgery technique—typical of paper money to this day—by printing a phrase in miniscule letters without breaks between words all across the background, which reads “*moustiques domestiques demistock*” [“mosquito servants half stock” or “domesticated mosquito half stock”].

Before noticing these subtler cracks in the veneer of legality, one might likely have been struck by the graphic conceit of the bond, which illustrated a roulette wheel and table in red, black, and yellow. The playing surface's divisions were left intact with the sections labeled *Noire* and *Rouge* and two corresponding colored diamonds, but were stripped of numbers. Two “collage” elements are included in the work: first, the authenticating stamp, a quite normal and perhaps reassuring feature of a bearer bond. The second, however, was certainly less so: pasted directly on top of the printed roulette wheel is a photograph of Duchamp, or of Sélavy, from the neck up in quarter-profile

¹¹ Ecke Bonk suggests that Duchamp appropriated the script in Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp, the Box in a Valise, de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy: Inventory of an Edition*, New York: Rizzoli, 1989, p. 245. He also reproduces an offset lithograph proof impression made in 1938 for the *Boîte-en-valise* which—oddly—reveal *more* of the decorative script than is visible in the 1924 version. I thank Francis Naumann for pointing out this fact.

view, face cast half in shadow. Taken by Man Ray, the image shows the artist covered in shaving lather, building up a white beard and, notoriously, forming his hair into the tufts or horns of a ram or goat, Pan-like faun or demon.

The photograph has given rise to two opposed iconographical readings, with Duchamp miming either a beast or the Beast. Among the latter group, for example, Henri-Pierre Roché—critic, novelist, and one of Duchamp’s closest friends at the time—compared Duchamp to “Mephistopheles, hair full of soap suds and twisted to pointed horns.”¹² In doing so, Duchamp could perhaps have been playing on the demonic associations that surrounded roulette since its origins in the 18th century, in part because the sum of all the numbers of the roulette wheel (1-36) is 666. In the former camp, Francis Naumann has argued that the photograph may be drawing on popular depictions of roulette gamblers—in postcards, satirical cartoons, and advertisements—as beasts off to the slaughter, in particular as horned goats or sheep (Figure 4.2).¹³ What seems certain in either case is that Duchamp was cannily performing the iconography of moralistic opposition to gambling—and perhaps also, as we shall see, to financial speculation—whether as its victim or perpetrator.

With the pasted photograph, it is also linked to *Wanted*, a work that David Joselit suggests should be considered a companion piece to the *Bond*, made the year prior (Figure 4.3).¹⁴ This readymade joke wanted poster, on which Duchamp glued two mugshot style photographs of himself, offered a \$2000 reward for information leading to

¹² H.P. Roché, “Souvenirs of Marcel Duchamp,” in Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, New York: Grove Press, 1959, p. 83

¹³ See Naumann, *Ghost* p. 107-108.

¹⁴ David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, p. 106-108

the arrest of a criminal known under the aliases of “Hooke, Lyon, and Cinquer” and, in Duchamp’s “rectified” version “RROSE SÉLAVY.” Duchamp’s lathered horns, likewise, seem to be advertising the illegitimacy and potential illegality of the bond. As Duchamp assured Ettie Stettheimer in March or May 1925, “Needless to say I’m not worried about being put in jail for issuing fraudulent bonds= They are not on the market and only my friends have them.” (AM 150).

However, certain steps that Duchamp took showed that he was quite serious about the bond and its pragmatic aim of raising capital for his roulette gamble. Indeed, while asserting the private nature of the bond to Stettheimer, he wrote to his friend Jane Heap, the editor of the *Little Review*, to place a short advertorial about his newest artistic and financial venture in the magazine, which appeared in the Winter 1924-25 issue. The advertisement by Heap—who also leaned toward the demonic in her interpretation of the photo—reads as follows:

Marcel Duchamp has formed a stock company of which he is the Administrator, etc. Shares are being sold at 500 francs. The money will be used to play a system in Monte Carlo. Stockholders to receive 20 per cent interest, etc. Some of the shares have arrived in this country and are very amusing in make-up. They carry a roulette wheel with a devil-like photograph of Marcel pasted upon it, they are signed twice by hand, -- Prose [sic] Sélavy (a name by which Marcel is as well known as by his regular name) appears as president of the company. If anyone is in the business of buying art curiosities as an investment, here is a chance to invest in a perfect masterpiece. Marcel’s signature alone is worth much more than the 500 francs asked for the share. Marcel has given up on painting entirely and has devoted most of his time to chess in the last few years. He will go to Monte Carlo early in January to begin the operation of his new company.¹⁵

Heap therefore emphasized the duplicity—if not duplicitousness—of the bond, noting Duchamp’s sincere plans to raise startup capital to “begin the operation of his new

¹⁵ J[ane] H[ear], “Comment” *Little Review* vol. 9, n. 4 (Autumn and Winter 1924-25): pp. 18-19.

company” in Monte Carlo, yet assuring potential investors that its status as an “art curiosity” guaranteed a more secure financial return.¹⁶ Duchamp, however, wrote back to Heap after the advertisement appeared in print to ask: “Will you show it around and send me the *exact* addresses? Insist on the serious side of the 20%.”¹⁷ Heap then wrote to Ettie Stettheimer, “I promise to act as his advance agent... He perhaps has some shyness in asking his good friends direct.”¹⁸ In the end, it seems, only about eight bonds were sold of the initial series, and all to friends of the artist, including Jacques Doucet, George Hoyningen-Hune, Marie Laurencin, Ettie Stettheimer, Madelaine Tremois, and Daniel Tzanck, his dentist.¹⁹

All this is to insist that Duchamp, despite the demonic photograph, was “serious” about the function of the bond and his obligation to pay 20% interest. Duchamp wrote to Stettheimer in spring 1925 to thank her for “entering into my system” and told her, “I sent you a bond yesterday by registered mail which is the only valid one of those you have seen_ because it is stamped_ If you have another (from Jane Heap I assume) keep it as a work of art but the 20% will be paid to you on the one I am sending you with this letter” (AM 149). He sent Doucet a *Bond* on January 16th, 1925 with the note, “Pretentiousness and its consequences= but I really would love to pay my dividends”

¹⁶ 500 francs was within the reasonably normal range of Duchamp’s prices at the time: Doucet paid 8000 frs. for Duchamp’s *Glider* in July 1923 (AM 136), for example, and Duchamp sold his *Green Box* in an edition of 20 for 750 frs. in 1934 (AM 190).

¹⁷ Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, *Ephemeridies on or about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy, 1887-1968*, Milan: Bompiani, 1993, 8 December 1924. (Note: This book is unpaginated and is instead ordered chronologically by calendar date.)

¹⁸ Cited in Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999, p. 101. The letter from Heap to Ettie Stettheimer is dated February 25, 1925, and housed in the Yale Collection of Americal Literature, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

¹⁹ Naumann, *Ghost* p. 109. Naumann writes that Tremois was “an acquaintance from Rouen who had been a close friend of Duchamp since the time of his stay in NY,” and that Hoyningen-Hune was a fashion photographer for French *Vogue*, who owned the bond numbered 1. *Ibid.*

(AM 148-49). The following winter, in a letter not included in his published correspondence, Duchamp followed up by sending 50 frs. to Doucet as an interest payment—the equivalent of two coupons—which is the only such payment he is known to have made.²⁰ Yet Duchamp may not be entirely to blame: to my knowledge not one of the owners of the authorized “stamped” bond actually clipped its coupons to receive payment.²¹ Each of the investors preferred to take a gamble on its appreciation as an art commodity rather than wager on Duchamp’s success at the roulette table.

As with his intention to pay interest, Duchamp committed to his “cumulative system” developed “experimentally” over the course of 100,000 spins of the roulette wheel, although specifics are rather vague. The first mention of his interest in gambling systems comes from spring 1924, on a trip to Nice, where he was by joined Picabia and Man Ray. Duchamp was in town for a chess tournament in early April and, while there, devoted himself to these antinomic activities: chess and gambling. As he wrote to Doucet on March 31st, 1924, “Outside of chess, I’m very occupied with *30 et 40*. I’ve tried many systems and have lost like a novice. I’ve since gotten a bit of experience and am achieving some better results. I’m playing without betting [*jouer à blanc*] and hold my own very well” (AM 142). Duchamp continued,

The best result is this: I’m not a gambler by any means_ I’m spending my afternoons in the gaming rooms and feel not the slightest temptation. Whatever I lost, I lost perfectly willingly and haven’t yet been smitten with gaming room ‘fever.’ I find this whole way of life very entertaining and I’ll explain one of my systems to you when I get back (AM 143).

²⁰ This unpublished letter was sent to Doucet on December 2, 1925: “Enfin ci-joint les 50f que je vous dois pour 6 mois de l’obligation Monte-Carlo.” This letter also contains the cryptic note, “J’ai eu soin de mettre sur le billet l’inscription au crayon afin que vous puissiez vous en servir en l’effaçant. (Quoique ambiguë, vous comprenez cette phrase).” (7204.57, Fonds Jacques Doucet, BLJD)

²¹ In conversation, Francis Naumann confirmed that he did not know of a *Bond* with coupons clipped. Having studied Doucet’s *Bond* (number 15) at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, I can attest that it is not missing any of its coupons.

Claiming indifference to “losing like a novice,” Duchamp nevertheless set himself to absurdly “playing” roulette or the card game “30 et 40” without betting, in order to develop his “system.” “You can of course guess what this is all leading up to,” as Duchamp concluded his letter to Doucet, “I really need the last 2000 F that you owe me” (AM 143).

Dealing with the death of his parents in February, it was not until June 1925 that Duchamp made it back to Monte Carlo to test out his system, where he stayed until September 11th. To Ettie Stettheimer, thanking her for buying a bond, he wrote in spring, “I’ve been working for a year_ and my statistics give me a lot of confidence... I’ll go settle in Monte Carlo for three months in June_ Summer there is gorgeous apparently” (AM 150). Katherine Dreier, for her part, having been informed of Duchamp’s project, offered to send him 5000 francs on the condition that he “abandon his idea of Monte Carlo.” “Like a small child who doesn’t think,” she wrote, he was rushing headfirst into a bad situation, and despite the gorgeous weather in Monte Carlo, she worried that “the psychological atmosphere in such a place is bad for a person as sensitive as Marcel.”²²

What did Duchamp do in the casinos and in what did these “statistics” consist? Writing to Picabia on April 17th, 1924, Duchamp gave one of the fullest accounts of his activities:

With very little capital, I’ve been experimenting with my system for 5 days_ I’m regularly winning small sums every day _ in 1 hour or two_ I’m still perfecting it, and I expect to return to Paris with the system just right. It’s a delicious monotony. Without the least emotion. The problem actually lies in finding a red and black combination [*figure*] to play against the roulette wheel. The Martingale is unimportant.... They are all good and all bad_ But with the right combination_ even a bad Martingale can hold up. And I believe I’ve found the right combination [*figure*]. As you can

²² Cited in Gough-Cooper and Caumont, December 8, 1924

see, I haven't stopped being a painter. Now I draw on chance (AM 143-44).

Man Ray, who visited Duchamp in Nice, and accompanied him to the casinos on at least one occasion, further recalled that Duchamp “studied the monthly sheets of all the numbers that came up, published by Monte Carlo, and worked out a system of placing his money that would infallibly bring in a return profit.”²³ And, later, Duchamp specified that he was “exploiting a Martingale to break the bank in Monte Carlo,” but continued, “Unfortunately, the system is too slow to have a practical value. I often had to wait over half an hour for the numbers to appear in the succession of reds and blacks and the weeks I spent in Monte Carlo were so boring that I soon abandoned it, happy to emerge without a loss” (DDS 213).

From these documents, we can glean certain facts: first, that he studied the sheets of roulette numbers and colors published in magazines like *La revue de Monte Carlo*, *revue scientifique*; second, that he restricted himself to betting on even odds (“*les chances simples*”), which is to say red or black, even or odd, *manque* (1-18) or *passe* (18-36); third, that his choice of where to place his bets was determined by a system he derived from his studies of published roulette statistics, likely involving a succession of reds and blacks; fourth, that he would bet only small amounts; fifth, that his bets would follow a “martingale” system; and, sixth, that it was all quite boring: slow and monotonous.

At the core of Duchamp's system—and, indeed, of almost all betting systems—was the martingale betting strategy. The martingale is applicable to any game where the

²³ Man Ray also insisted on the link between the roulette system and Duchamp's art, “In some of [Duchamp's] previous creations, the unknown and mysterious laws of chance and hazard had been the starting point. He wished to probe these more deeply—to master them so that the results of a premeditated action could be foreseen, controlled. And so he took up roulette.” Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, Boston: Little Brown, 1963, p. 236.

odds of winning or losing are even, and involves doubling one's bets every time one loses, and betting only a single unit with every win. Therefore, facing a succession of losses, if one doesn't lose one's nerve and continues to double the bets, even a single win will be enough to recoup all the money lost. For example, if I decide to apply the martingale to a coin toss and always bet on heads (since the chances are equal), I would bet a single dollar to begin with, and repeat that bet with every win, yet double my bet whenever tails came up. Therefore, if I were to lose four times in a row, my bets would follow a sequence of 1-2-4-8 and I would have lost a total of \$15. If invited by my opponent to bet again on a fifth toss and I decide to continue with the system, I would have to double my last bet and wager \$16 dollars. If heads come up, I would win \$16 dollars to recoup all my losses thus far and earn a single dollar of profit. If tails come up and I lose, I will have lost \$31 dollars and need to bet \$32 additional dollars. Assuming that one is playing a fair game, continually doubling one's bets seems like a good strategy, since no matter how many losses suffered, a single win will be enough to recoup all losses. And, restricting oneself to betting only one unit after a win, the player avoids the "gaming room fever" for the methodical accumulation of profit. The martingale, thus, rests on the high probability that neither win nor loss will predominate in a fair game over a large number of games, and that the "equality" of chances will prevail. Such, one can assume, was the initial meaning of Duchamp's "dabbling in equality."

Duchamp was far from the first to apply this seemingly sound logic to the gambling tables of Monte Carlo. He may have first encountered it in the memoirs of Giacomo Casanova, which Duchamp owned and evidently admired.²⁴ Casanova, a

²⁴ Duchamp owned a set of the eight volumes of Casanova's memoirs. See Marc Décimo, *La Bibliothèque de Marcel Duchamp, peut-être*, Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002, p. 100

notorious gambler, recalled visiting the casinos in Venice and experiencing a run of good luck: “I took all the gold I found, and playing the martingale, and doubling my stakes continuously, I won every day during the remainder of the carnival.”²⁵ On another occasion, Casanova described his reversal of fortune, “I still played on the martingale, but with such bad luck that I was soon left without a sequin.”²⁶ Yet he still held out for the emergence of the right “system”: “[Bankruptcy] must be the fate awaiting every man who has a taste for gambling, unless he should know how to fix fickle fortune by playing with a real advantage derived from calculation or from adroitness, which defies chance.”²⁷

The hope of “defying chance” at the roulette table through a martingale strategy was, in Duchamp’s time, still rather common. The author of detective stories, Maurice DeKobra, for example, in an article published in *Le Journal* titled “My Martingale” published on December 27, 1925, described his system for winning roulette in strikingly similar terms:

Naturally, I have a martingale that allows me, with a fund of 12000 francs, to win 20 francs a day by playing for nine consecutive hours. You’ll tell me that this game isn’t very lucrative and that if I scrubbed floors, I’d earn 44 francs a day with a union wage. But I wouldn’t have the divine emotions that this small ball, capricious and fantastical, procures for me. I’ll generously share the secret of my martingale, if you feel like it.²⁸

His “infallible” martingale, which he keeps written down in a notebook, sounded much like Duchamp’s—even in his sardonic comparison of gambling earnings with waged labor—and involved doubling down on losses and placing bets on even odds according to

²⁵ Giacomo Casanova, *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova*, v. IV, Trans. Arthur Machen, London: Bartholomew Robson, 1894, p. 105.

²⁶ “I still played on the martingale, but with such bad luck that I was soon left without a sequin.” *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²⁷ Casanova, *Memoirs*, V. II, p. 9.

²⁸ Maurice DeKobra, “Ma Martingale,” *Le Journal* (27 December 1925): p. 2.

a predetermined pattern and only after a certain number of rolls. The comic article describes the author showing off to a woman at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo that his system guarantees him the rather paltry earnings of 20 F a day, the certainty of which is “*ma-thé-ma-tique*.” She convinced him to share his system, and a few days later he meets her again decked out in jewelry thanks to her husband, who “having made some modification to your system,” has won 30,000 F a session.²⁹

For each such fantasy, however, there were more skeptical exposés of the rather shaky grounds for the martingale. The British inventor Hiram S. Maxim, for example, published in 1904 his book *Monte Carlo facts and fallacies*, in which he described the martingale as “the least bad system that could be devised” for winning roulette.³⁰ The piece, which Duchamp could very well have encountered in the course of his research on roulette systems, was first published in French in the Nice newspaper *L'Écho de la Méditerranée* in 1903 as a response to a certain Baron Czyllak who had claimed in a previous issue: “No serious person would pretend that they could neutralise by any mathematical combinations whatsoever the present advantages of the Bank at roulette, the maximum stakes being limited as they are.”³¹ Maxim maintained that the best way to play roulette is by restricting oneself to even odds, which offer the smallest rewards but the highest chances of winning, betting small amounts (he suggests one louis [20 francs]), and doubling on one’s losses in order to extract minor but dependable profits from a large number of séances. The first challenge, he admitted, was to avoid a run of losses that would raise the stakes beyond the casino’s maximum or that would exhaust the player’s

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hiram S. Maxim, *Monte Carlo Facts and Fallacies*, London: Grant Richards, 1904, p. 170

³¹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 171.

capital. For example, if one takes as one's basic unit a casino chip that costs 20 f, a run of five losses will cost 620 f and require a bet of 640 f to get out of the hole; six losses would cost 1260 f and require a bet of a 1280 f; and so on. With the bets rising exponentially, a string of bad luck could quickly bankrupt any player who did not have large amounts of capital (Maxim recommended at least 25,000 fr. for an effective martingale).³² Indeed, many casinos place a limit on how much a person can wager on any single bet—a policy conceived precisely to dash the hopes of martingale devotees.

Maxim outlined further flaws to the martingale, potentially even more serious. The first was that all statistically-based gambling systems imagined that they could defeat the house advantage. After providing a table of probabilities demonstrating the merits of the martingale, Hiram confessed, “these are the theoretical possibilities with zero suppressed, but not the actual probabilities that obtain at roulette at Monte Carlo. If one plays the ordinary Martingale, one must not lose sight of the fact that zero serves to make adverse runs occur oftener...”³³ For roulette, the house advantage centers on the zero (usually colored green): if the ball lands on zero, all bets on single numbers lose and all the chips on even money bets are placed “*en prison*” for another roll, meaning that each existing wager is repeated. The *croupier* calls out “*refait*” and rolls the wheel again. If one loses the spin, the dealer takes the money; but if one wins, the dealer only releases the imprisoned chip, with no gain, meaning a loss of potential profit. This being the case, Maxim maintained, while the martingale has not eliminated the house advantage, it “offers the smallest mark to the *refait*.”³⁴

³² *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

The second flaw of the martingale might be called aesthetic. “Based strictly on the laws of chance and probability,” the system eliminated the source of pleasure in gambling: “I am well aware of the fact that everything that smacks, even in the least degree, of mathematical calculations or reasoning, is distasteful to the majority of mankind... It is too cold and unsympathetic for their aesthetic tastes.”³⁵ Maxim continued,

If one wishes to play for the sake of play alone, if the play at Monte Carlo is considered a valuable kind of enjoyment, sufficiently valuable to be paid for... the doubling-up system of the Martingale is, without doubt, the worst possible system.... If, however, we do not care for the pleasure of moving the pieces about on the board, if the actual play, as an amusement, has no value to us, if we have but one end in view, and that to reduce the Bank’s chances to a minimum and to increase our chances of actually winning money from the Bank to a maximum, then the Martingale has a decided advantage over all other systems.³⁶

It is not known which variation on the Martingale Duchamp played, or whether he experimented with alternative systems (such as the riskier “grand Martingale,” for example, which follows the betting progression 1-3-7-15-31-63-127, etc.). But Maxim’s description of the Martingale as an anti-aesthetic or anti-ludic strategy is key to Duchamp’s stated aims in these years. The mechanical dimension of the betting strategy, which Maxim described as an affront to most aesthetic sensibilities seems to be exactly what Duchamp sought. He told Stettheimer before setting off to Monaco, “I’m going to play over there in this frame of mind: a mechanical mind against a machine. Nothing romantic about this business, no more than chance” (AM 150-51).

Duchamp’s belief that he could eliminate subjectivity and the house advantage to become a *surcroupier* is emblemized, perhaps, in the fact that his lathered horns

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁵ (184)

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

obscure the dealer's green "zero" in the print (which would be at the apex). Even setting aside the house advantage, the conviction that one could make strategic choices in betting—by waiting for a certain succession of reds and blacks before placing a bet, for example—inevitably falls prey to the so-called "gambler's fallacy," or "Monte Carlo Fallacy." The martingale strategy depends upon a false belief in the maturity of chances, which conflates the overall probability that in a fair game red or black will turn up 50% of the time with the results of any given throw, imagining, therefore, that the likelihood of the ball landing on red increases with each consecutive black result. Maxim's text, for example, bore an illustration of two gamblers discussing strategy (Figure 4.4). The man exclaims that he had waited at the roulette tables all day until black had come up ten times, and then bet ten louis on red—and still lost. The woman chastises him, "Foolish man... you should never bet against a colour that is coming up," and advises him to "follow the table" instead, which is to say, to recognize that each table has its own innate preferences.³⁷ If this latter gambler explicitly invested roulette wheels with occult properties, so too did any player who strategized on even bets act as though the roulette ball had a "memory." If ten rolls in a row landed on red, this would be statistically unlikely, but it would not mean that black was any more likely on eleventh spin than on the first.

Hubert Damisch sums up the paradox of the martingale: "It is the belief in the inevitable restoration of a final equilibrium from which the fantasy of the martingale derives; yet in practice one could hope to profit only from a long series of successes

³⁷ Maxim comments, "On one occasion, I asked the lady what she meant by 'jumpy'; she said that it jumped backwards and forwards from black to red, that there were no runs, and that it was absolutely impossible to win anything when playing on a jumpy table." *Ibid.*, p. 188.

which would seem to defy any probable equilibrium.”³⁸ Duchamp’s martingale, Damisch continues, is “intended to counteract chance, to trick it, catching it up in its own laws, to treat it finally as an opponent, and roulette as a two-party game, one that obeys an actual geometry” or “figure.”³⁹ On the one hand, Duchamp’s hope of devising a “system” to “break the bank” and outwit chance resembles the delusions of any martingale gambler⁴⁰; yet, on the other, once in Monte Carlo, it is precisely Duchamp’s acceptance of “wandering in equality,” of playing indifferent to both the loss and the win, without any “*échauffement*” that differentiates his activity from that of the standard gambler (AM 151-52). “Dabbling in equality,” Duchamp irrationally sought only to break even: “I’m neither ruined or a millionaire and I’ll be neither one nor the other,” as he wrote to Doucet (AM 151-52).

In this, Duchamp seemed to have considered roulette as the dialectical counterpart to chess. As he put it to Doucet in a letter from January 16th, 1925 “I believe I have eliminated the word chance_ I would like to think I have forced roulette to become a game of chess” (AM 148-49). And, further, when Arturo Schwarz asked Duchamp about the relationship between chess, which depends on the mind, and gambling, which depends on chance, he responded, “In both cases it is a fight between two human beings,

³⁸ Hubert Damisch, “The Duchamp Defense,” *October* N. 10 (Autumn 1979): 20. Damisch continues, “The very idea of charting chance, of demanding that it behave as if it had a memory (when in heads and tails each throw amounts to a new player starting off a new game), of restricting it to a limit hoping for rewards that are themselves limited, this idea means still treating chance as a background which resists control and effacement by any figure.” *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

⁴⁰ Duchamp recalled, “See for example the Martingale I conceived to break the bank in Monte Carlo roulette tables. Naturally, the bank is always there! But I believed that I had found a system.” DDS 178

and by introducing more chance in chess and reducing the chance factor in gambling, the two activities could meet somehow.”⁴¹

Indeed, while Duchamp was engaged in his roulette system in Monte Carlo, he was also playing in the Third French Chess Tournament about twenty kilometers away in Nice, from September 2-11, where he was named Master of the Fédération Française des Echecs.⁴² Evidence of his thinking about chess and chance is provided by the poster he designed for the tournament (Figure 4.5). For this work, Duchamp placed a number of cubes in a net, tossed them, photographed the arrangement, and then traced the outlines of the blocks from an enlarged photo. The blocks, arranged by chance and forming spatially ambiguous (or perspectively impossible) combinations, are colored light pink, white, and black and placed within the outlines of a Staunton model King chess piece.

The poster’s literal introjection of chance into chess mirrors Duchamp’s theoretical fascination with the extremely unlikely endgame. This manifested itself in *Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled by Duchamp et Halberstadt*, a book published and designed in 1932 by Duchamp and Vitaly Halberstadt, an excerpt of which was also published in the second issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (Figure 4.6). Proving the “existence of new forms of heterodox opposition,” the book ran through a series of endgame scenarios that met two conditions: first, that only a few pawns and two kings remained; and, second, that the pawns were blocked so that only the

⁴¹ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, v. II, New York: Delano Greenridge Editions, 1997, p. 66

⁴² Gough-Cooper and Caumont, 2 September 1925. Duchamp’s match against André Chéron lasted five hours, after which Duchamp ultimately won. He had begun to take chess seriously as a possible career upon his return to Europe from New York, and placed third in the Brussels Tournament of 1923, an event “that amply flatters my vanity as a chess player,” he noted. Schwarz, *Complete Works*, v. I, pp. 65-66.

kings were able to move. Constrained in this way, the players engaged in what Roché described as “haughty junket of the kings”:

Only sometimes the King has a choice between two moves and may act in such a way as to suggest he has completely lost interest in winning the game. Then the other King, if he too is a true sovereign, can give the appearance of being even less interested, and so on. Thus the two monarchs can waltz carelessly one by one across the board as though they weren't at all engaged in mortal combat.⁴³

The winner, then, is determined by who can avoid making a single blunder while performing a “haughty” indifference. Duchamp would later claim about this book that “Even the chess champions don't read the book, since the problem it poses really only comes up once in a lifetime. They're endgame problems of possible games but so rare as to be nearly Utopian.”⁴⁴ The unique character of these situations—“neither common nor utilitarian,” he noted—is one where the kings neutralize each other and may play at disinterestedness, “wandering in equality” like Duchamp in Monte Carlo.⁴⁵

In 1937, Roger Caillois reviewed Duchamp's chess book, and insisted on its anti-ludic dimension:

The only important thing to note is that these intellectual adventures are situated in a domain that absolutely eliminates the psychological element that is implied in the agonistic nature of the game.... All that remains in the problems studied by Duchamp is the development of logical series that are adapted from the beginning to a distant and ineluctable success. Winning or losing cease to signify victory or defeat but are only contrary

⁴³ Roché “Souvenirs” in Lebel, p. 83.

⁴⁴ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Trans Ron Padgett, New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, p. 78

⁴⁵ The cover design of the book projected chance upon its physical surface. As Pierre de Massot puts it, Duchamp had put stencil letters between two panes of glass, stood them upright at an angle exposed to the sun, and photographed their shadows: “The uncontrolled deformation produced on the ground by the sun's rays passing through the cut-out parts of the letters was photographed by Duchamp, who afterward made a negative from this photograph, which was stereotyped.” Pierre de Massot, “Lu le soir,” *Orbes* 2, n. 2 (Summer 1933): p. 16. Cited in Schwarz, *Collected Works, V. II*, p. 901, Apparently Duchamp exhibited the letters along with the *Rotoreliefs* at an exhibition organized by *Orbes* in March 1937 at “La Cachette.” See Lebel, p. 173

signs, equivalent and interchangeable, simple supplementary elements to the enunciated.⁴⁶

Caillois, in this way, revealed the link between the martingale and the chess endgame: the attempted statistical abolition of chance at the roulette table and the working through of impossibly complex situations in chess are both ways of negating the psychology of play and its “agonistic” dimension. “Winning” and “losing” lose their meaning and are radically “equalized.” At the roulette table, and later in the waltz of the kings, Duchamp imagined a kind of activity that was totally indifferent to ends, and which aspired only to a kind of “equality” or “neutrality identical to the void,” to put it in Mallarmé’s terms (OCI 383). Recalling Duchamp’s Monte Carlo gambit, Man Ray wrote, “[Duchamp] played his system carefully and according to plan. He won small sums, but never enough to reimburse his backers.... The game wasn’t worth much effort. Duchamp returned to Paris, satisfied that he had conquered the laws of chance.”⁴⁷

Language and the Throw of the Dice: Mallarmé, Duchamp, Arensberg

If Duchamp could write to Doucet, “I believe in this case to have eliminated the word chance,” he did so knowing that the designer and collector would receive the phrase’s Mallarméan overtones.⁴⁸ Mallarmé had been a standard reference for the

⁴⁶ Roger Caillois, “*Les Échecs Artistiques* par André Chéron (Payot) et *L’Opposition et les Cases Conjuguées sont Réconciliées* par Marcel Duchamp et Vitaly Halberstadt,” *Nouvelle Revue Française*, (September 1937): pp. 511-514. Cited in Michel Vanpeene, “Marcel Duchamp et Pierre de Massot en Orbes,” *Étant Donnée* N. 2 (1999): p. 166

⁴⁷ Man Ray, p. 236.

⁴⁸ From 1916 to his death in 1929, Doucet amassed the single most important collection of Mallarmé’s manuscripts and publications outside of the family’s estate, a project he carried out in tandem with his collecting of the literary and artistic avant-gardes bridging the generations from Cubism to Dada and Surrealism (from Apollinaire and Pierre Reverdy to Tristan Tzara and André Breton). On Doucet, see François Chapon, *C’était Jacques Doucet*, Paris: Fayard, 2006.

“Section d’Or” Cubists with which Duchamp and his siblings were affiliated—the “constructive cubists” with their mechanistic Mallarmé, as Tzara characterized them—and Duchamp recalled that although in his youth, “I wasn’t very, very, literary at the time,” “I read a little, especially Mallarmé.”⁴⁹ By 1918, Duchamp’s friend Roché remarked in his journal that Marcel had affirmed “nothing new has been written since Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés Jamais n’Abolira le Hasard*.”⁵⁰ And, that summer of 1918, when in Buenos Aires to organize an exhibition introducing the developments of European modernism to Argentina, Duchamp wrote to Jean Crotti to ask for copies of the treatises on cubism by Apollinaire and by Gleizes and Metzinger, and for “four or five copies of Mallarmé’s poem *Un Coup de Dés*.”⁵¹ In this exhibition, he noted, “I myself won’t show anything, following my principles” (AM 65).

Duchamp’s abandonment of his native medium (painting) and country (France) in 1915 was concomitant with a period of renewed and focused study of Mallarmé. Arriving in New York on June 15th, 1915, Duchamp took up the speculative question, written two years prior, “Can one make works which are not works of ‘art’?” (DDS 111). Writing to Walter Pach prior to his arrival, he noted “I hope to be able to escape leading the artistic life, if needs be through a job which will keep me very busy... I am afraid of getting to the stage of needing to sell canvases, in a word, of being a professional painter [*artiste peintre*]” (AM 36). It is with some irony, then, that, thanks to Pach, Duchamp moved in with Walter and Louise Arensberg at 33 West Sixty-Seventh St., an apartment devoted

⁴⁹ In an analogy that will gain in meaning as this chapter continues, Duchamp recalled, “I liked Laforgue a lot, and I like him even more now, although his public stock has gone way down.” Cabanne, p. 30

⁵⁰ Scarlett Reliquet, *Henri-Pierre Roché: L’enchanteur collectionneur*, Paris: Ramsay, 1999, p. 96.

⁵¹ Cited in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014, p. 209.

precisely to the artistic culture that he was trying to escape, with walls covered by works by Picasso, Braque, Gleizes, Matisse, and La Fresnaye.⁵² Arensberg had also received the new and “definitive” edition of *Un Coup de Dés* soon after it was published by the *Nouvelle revue Française* in 1914, edited according to the author’s final manuscript specifications by his son-in-law Edmond Bonniot.⁵³ Immersed in conversation with Arensberg about Mallarmé and the nature of language, and seeking a form of work that was not “of art,” Duchamp turned his attentions to a textual study of the poem.

What remains of his work on Mallarmé are two sheets of paper preserved in the Arensberg archives, one typewritten and one manuscript, which were discovered by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse and given an important analysis by Molly Nesbit (Figure 4.7).⁵⁴ In pencil on paper, Duchamp copied out a number of words from *Un Coup de Dés* in prose-like rows, seemingly indifferent to the spatialized layout of the published poem as to the order of the phrases established by the poet. Some words have squares drawn around them, and are distributed across the page in what appears as random order:

“Abîme,” “Nombre,” “Esprit,” “Fiançailles,” “Septentrion,” “Nord”—and then at bottom

⁵² After the Armony Show in 1913, the Arensbergs amassed one of the most important collections of European modern art in America. In this, they were aided first by Pach, then by Marius de Zayas, and, finally, by Marcel Duchamp who would become their advisor. In 1915, a number of small galleries had opened in which the newest manifestations of primarily French modernism could be seen, and where the Arensbergs purchased their works: the Bourgeois, Carroll, Daniel, Modern, and Washington Square galleries. See Francis Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915-23*, New York: Abrams, 1994 p. 25.

⁵³ Arensberg had photocopies made—in negative—of his copy of *Un Coup de Dés*, seemingly upon his arrival in Hollywood in 1921. (Folio 7, box 45, Arensberg Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art.)

⁵⁴ Folio 26, box 43, Arensberg Archives, PMA. Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse first published a number of manuscripts by Duchamp and Arensberg, including those under discussion here, in their essay “Concept of Nothing: New Notes by Marcel Duchamp and Walter Arensberg,” *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table*, MIT Press: 1996, pp. 130-175. Nesbit expanded her interpretation of these archival discoveries in a substantial analysis of the relation of European modernism to educational technique in Nesbit, *Their Common Sense*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000. As these two texts offer comprehensive accounts of Duchamp’s relationship with the Arensberg circle, I will not dwell on it at length, and instead direct the reader to these important texts.

in a row, unmistakable to anyone familiar with the poem—“Toute,” “Pensée,” “Coup,” “Dés.” Scrawled in the top corner are illegible phrases that seem to include more words drawn from the poem: “Si” “Naguères” and “Ce Doit [être],” but also “va,” “va/is go,” and “moon,” which do not figure in *Un Coup de Dés* (in French or in any conceivable English translation). Two dice (showing the numbers five and two, or maybe three) tumble from a cylindrical shape—perhaps a cornet à dés—and a few dots are scattered at top, floating free from any die, or marking the “sidereal” pattern of a constellation.

On the next sheet, Duchamp typed out the words scrawled out on the first:

Quand bien même lancé dans des circonstances éternelles du fond d’un naufrage soit le maître (existât-il ... commencât-il et cessât-il se chiffât-il, illuminât-il) rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu, excepté peut-être une constellation.

On these two sheets, Duchamp isolated and wrote out as prose the words that are printed in all capitals in Mallarmé’s poem. In the manuscript, the words scattered about the page in boxes are all the non-italicized words with a capitalized first letter, which Duchamp placed with respect to their relative location in the text.⁵⁵ Thereby, Duchamp followed the vision of the poem as a score for readerly performance that Mallarmé described in the poem’s preface, operating through “the difference in the printer’s characters between the preponderant, secondary and adjacent motifs, which dictate the importance” (OCI 391-92). If such multidirectional readings based on the typographical variation became quite common in the twentieth century, and were not wholly without precedent in 1915, Duchamp proved himself an astute reader, following the hint that Mallarmé laid with the languid extension of the title phrase across the expanse of the poem.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Of the words that have a capitalized first letter, Duchamp ignored those in italics and those that begin lines, such as “Une,” “La,” and “Choit.”

Once one engages with the poem in this way—building phrases from the typographical character of words and from their placement on the pages—the options for readership expand vastly. One could, for example, supplement Duchamp’s list with the italicized capitals that he excluded to explore the hypothetical relation between the “number that can be no other” and chance: “Comme si, comme si. Si c’était le nombre (Existât-il Commençât-il et cessât-il se chiffât-il illuminât-il) ce serait le Hasard” (“As if, as if. If it were the number [it would exist, it would begin and end, it would be decoded, it would be illuminated] it would be Chance”) (OCI 376-383) (Figure 4.8). Or, one could consent to mix typographies and establish links between lines according to sense, selectively suppressing any interceding lines judged to be subsidiaries: “Le Maître, hors d’anciens calculs, s’agite au poing qui l’êtreindrait l’unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre pour le jeter dans la tempête hésite plutôt que de jouer... à n’ouvrir pas la main crispée par delà l’inutile tête” [“The master, outside of ancient calculations, stirs and mixes in the fist that embraces it, the unique number that cannot be another, to throw it into the storm, hesitates rather than playing.... to not open the clenched hand above the useless head”] (OCI 372-74).

If one consents to read as Duchamp did, from the “incomprehensible” linguistic miasma of the poem may emerge an image of the ship’s “master” shaking dice in his fist,

⁵⁶ Thierry Roger notes that Duchamp’s attention to the “tabular” nature of the poem evinces “an approach that seems rather rare in the period, since most of the considerations of *Un Coup de Dés* are limited to restating the points made in the ‘preface’ of 1897 or to discussions of the ‘failure’ [*l’échec*] of Mallarmé.” Thierry Roger, *L’archive du Coup de dés: Étude critique de la réception d’Un Coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le hasard de Mallarmé, 1897-2007*, Dissertation: Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2008: p. 136. Albert Thibaudet, however, the most astute and well-informed commentator, wrote in his book on Mallarmé from 1912, “But the title with its prominent typography was conceived by Mallarmé as a unique phrase, an essential motif, the words of which are spaced throughout the work, leaving space, between their gaps, for secondary motifs which support other even more minor ones.” Albert Thibaudet, *La poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Paris: Éditions de la nouvelle revue française, 1912, p. 419 Thibaudet also isolated and analyzed the phrase “Rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu, excepté peut-être, une constellation.” *Ibid.*, 431

held over his head, as he confronts a storm that threatens to sink his ship. Intending to cast the dice into “eternal circumstances” and realize a number that would either confirm “ancient calculations” or replace them with a new necessary number, he hesitates rather than tossing them, while his “useless head” is progressively submerged. Realizing the vanity of his hope that an incontrovertible number would result from any one throw of the dice, the master suspends his act, disappearing without a trace, yet maintaining the existence of chance *in potentia*. In doing so, the virtual infinity of chance is mirrored in a constellation (the seven stars of the *Septentrion Nord*)—perhaps glimpsed by the master as his head is submerged—hinting at the “intimate correlation between poetry and the universe,” as Mallarmé put it elsewhere.⁵⁷

However, this precarious narrative cohesion is not given immediately to the reader, but has been produced by a process, like that evinced in Duchamp’s manuscript, of sifting through a “vagueness in which all reality is dissolved,” aware of the possibility of reaching only a “result that is null, human” and that sinks our “little virile reason” (OCI 385, 379). As Nesbit put it, Duchamp’s “Mallarmé page... looked for system, hoped for a meaning and then found a sea of scribbled confusion, a wreck.”⁵⁸ No gloss on Mallarmé’s theme and no “system” could account for the fact that the “Master’s” dice throw allegorizes the reader’s own wager on meaning production, always contingent and never stabilized.

The key phrase of Mallarmé’s poem for Duchamp, the one that he isolated at the bottom of the page and drew squares around, was the motto in capitalized words written at the end of the poem: “Toute Pensée [émet un] Coup [de] Dés.” This conception of

⁵⁷ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 366.

⁵⁸ Nesbit, *Their Common Sense*, London: Black Dog Press, 2000, p. 194

thought launching a throw of the dice as it passes through the aleatory medium of language was, for Mallarmé, linked to the contingent being of the universe after the death of God, twin voids that the poet had to confront. The sonnet *Quand l'ombre...* (1883), which shares much with *Un Coup de Dés*, describes a poet “menaced by a fatal law” and “grieved to perish under a funereal ceiling,” which is to say, the empty sky vacated by God (OCI 36).⁵⁹ Facing this “space identical to itself”—an emptiness not underwritten or subtended by any principle or being other than the void—the poet nevertheless “casts [*roule*] into this tedium trivial fires to witness/The genius kindled by a festive star” (OCI 36).⁶⁰ The poet Albert Mockel recalled Mallarmé describing his theses on the place of the poet in the universe at his famous *mardis* in this way, “An incoherent chaos, the image of our disorder, a heap of formless matter infinitely awaiting the laborer [*l'ouvrier*] who would give it order.”⁶¹ Citing *Un Coup de Dés*, Mockel continued, “Beyond us, the universe is the boundless domain of Chance. Every human action certifies the chance that it seeks to negate; in realizing itself, it borrows its medium from chance. But chance can make a world surge forth.”⁶² Mockel captured the dialectical force of Mallarmé’s thinking about chance, which cannot be reduced to affirmation or negation.

⁵⁹ For Paul Bénichou, this poem reflects how Mallarmé sublated the hopelessness with which he was struck in the 1860s into a positive model of atheism. “Mallarmé describes a nocturnal meditation, lived under a starry sky, which conducts the poet not to celebrate, as per usual, the supposed God of such a universe, but to disavow it formally.” Paul Bénichou, *Selon Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, P. 195

⁶⁰ I’ve drawn on and modified the translation by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore in Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 67. On the status of genius, Bénichou comments “For Mallarmé, who identifies the supposed God as a figure of the Void, the intellect is the privilege of humanity, and it’s to separate humanity from God that he glorifies genius.” Bénichou, *Selon Mallarmé*, p. 197.

⁶¹ Albert Mockel, *Stéphane Mallarmé (Un Héros)*, Paris: Editions du Mercure de France, 1899, p. 48.

⁶² *Ibid.* Here, Mockel cited, “*Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’abolira le Hasard*, publié par la revue *Cosmopolis*.”

For Mallarmé, the contingency of the universe went all the way down to the structure of language itself, meaning that this cosmic predicament could not be depicted as a naturalistic theme by the poet but had to be made a principle of poetic production. As Paul Bénichou puts it, “Atheism wasn’t rare among the young Parnassians, but Mallarmé was the only one who maintained the effects of disenchantment right into the poet’s elocution, instead of stopping short of this sanctuary.”⁶³ However, the cosmic dice throw was first conceived as precisely such a metaphor for the poet’s labor within a formless universe, and was the subject of his unfinished “philosophical tale” *Igitur, ou la folie d’Elbehnon*, written in 1869 in Avignon while laboring on his dissertation about the science of language and coming to grips with a conception of human nature as a “vain form of matter.”⁶⁴ There, Mallarmé described a character named Igitur or *Elbehnon* (“I’ll be none”), who descends the staircase to his family’s tomb in order to perform the absurd task of casting a set of dice at Midnight. In doing so, Igitur allegorized Mallarmé’s own “excavation of verse” as he “descends the stairs of the human spirit, goes to the bottom of things: to the ‘absolute’ that he is. Tomb—ashes (no sentiment, no spirit) neutrality” (OCI 474). Igitur, risking death and disappearance, and contravening a parental warning by entering his own tomb, intends to cast the dice in order to negate chance once and for all by obtaining an absolute number as the result of the throw.⁶⁵

⁶³ Bénichou, *Selon Mallarmé*, p. 26.

⁶⁴ Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 297

⁶⁵ There is evidence that Mallarmé initially meant the “negation of chance” quite seriously and literally. In Mallarmé’s youth, for example, writing to Henri Cazalis on January 7th, 1864, he contrasted his methodical style, “loyal to the severe ideas inherited from my great Master Edgar Poë” with that of Emmanuel des Essarts who “takes a handful of stars from the milky way and lets them take shape into unexpected constellations according to chance.” Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, p. 161. Mallarmé was referring to Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition,” in which the American author of weird tales explained his writing process for “The Raven,” demonstrating “that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or

In *Igitur*, Mallarmé explicitly associated the dice throw with the poetic act, and in particular with his anxiety regarding the historical, aesthetic, and theological possibility of continuing with the traditions of metrical poetry (especially the French alexandrine) in the absence of the divine suturing of the Logos. The situation was especially acute for the poet, whose historical task had been to bind the materiality of words to their sense through strict adherence to a numerical system based on the count of syllables and the sonorous consonance of rhyme. Seeking to reconnect with this tradition, *Igitur* goes to the tomb of his ancestors and shakes two dice in his hands, hoping vainly for the result of 12. As discussed in Chapter Three, 12 is the number of syllables in an alexandrine rhyming couplet, the medium of Racine and Corneille for example. To achieve a roll of 12, then, would be to “prove” that this tradition was not a meaningless accident of chance—why 12 syllables and not 10?—but a guarantee of linguistic access to truth and continuity with the great achievements of the poet’s “lineage.” Conversely, to receive any of the other 11 results of the dice throw would be to “affirm” chance and prove the obsolescence of poetic tradition.⁶⁶

Mallarmé seemed to have considered both possibilities, which brought the poem to a standstill, never to be completed. Yet, one passage of the poem described *Igitur* hesitating Hamlet-like, suspending the moment of decision, where he would cast the dice

intuition—that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.” Edgar Allan Poe, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999, p. 102. For a discussion of Mallarmé’s interpretation of Poe’s essay, see Danielle Follett, *The Ghost of God: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Poetics and the Aesthetics of Chance*, (PhD Dissertation: Johns Hopkins University, 2007): pp. 115-123

⁶⁶ On this point, Mallarmé remarked cryptically, “Qu’une parole jetée sur les dés car ce ne peut être avec certitude qu’une parole, ne s’accomplisse pas, —comme il y avait selon la pensée, 11 chances qu’elle ne s’accomplît pas contre une, le hazard s’affirme, quant à la parole, en se niant quant à la pensée—Car le hazard eût été que la parole s’accomplît. Toutefois si elle s’accomplit le hazard se nie quant à la parole, en s’affirmant quant à la pensée, car celle-ci doit...” (OCI 476).

to negate or affirm chance. In his “infinite hesitation,” Igitur discovers the means to overcome both options:

In short, in an act where chance is in play, it is always chance that accomplishes its proper Idea in affirming or denying itself. Before its existence, negation and affirmation are exhausted. It contains the Absurd—implies it, but in a latent state, preventing it from existing: which permits Infinity to be (OCI 476).

In refusing to throw the dice, Mallarmé proposed, Igitur demonstrated that “Infinity emerges from chance, which you have negated” (OCI 474). In other words, seeking to deny chance by proving an absolute necessity, Igitur casts the dice and hopes for the result of 12. Yet he realizes before his act that even if he achieved the desired result, that number would be just as “absurd” as any other. By holding the dice in his fists, however, Igitur preserved chance in its “latency”: chance is affirmed as the cause of any possible result, but, suspended in its potential or virtual state, chance is also negated precisely by being recognized as necessary or absolute. In this hesitation, Igitur realizes “there is and there is not chance—it reduces chance to *Infinity*” (OCI 478). As Paul de Man puts it, “At the end of *Igitur*, [Mallarmé’s] only concern is the creation of a poetic language which will be able to discover ‘*hasard*’ under all appearances of certainty, and thus to transcend it by asserting its universal presence.”⁶⁷

For the rest of his life, Mallarmé sought to work through the consequences of this idea for poetry, returning to the “theme” of the dice throw in *Un Coup de Dés*. The recognition that the structuring principles of poetry—rhyme and meter—were precisely the elements of language in which semiotic “motivation’ was most attenuated (i.e., linguistic sonority and syllabic count) did not lead Mallarmé to abandon these conventions (as the free verse poets would do in the 1880s, inspired by his example).

⁶⁷ Paul de Man, *Post-Romantic Predicament*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012, p. 88.

Indeed, Mallarmé maintained that the poetic act *par excellence* was always to “vanquish chance word by word” by forging language into an aesthetic unity precisely by structuring its most aleatory aspects (D 236). The status of the dice throw underwent a shift in Mallarmé’s later works: no longer referring primarily to the syllabic count of the alexandrine as it did in *Igitur*, it became a figure for the act of human communication as such, the vain act of constructing a thought in language with the hope of being understood—all the while knowing that this wager was impossible, cast from within a shipwreck or upon one’s own tomb. Considered undialectically, “negating chance” would imply the successful reconciliation of language’s chaotic matter with its meaning and “affirming chance” would mean the wholesale abandonment of the task. Mallarmé refused both options by transposing the choice into the realm of “fiction” or hypothesis: precisely through the rigorous structuring of language, Mallarmé produced an indeterminacy, a hesitation, that suspended access to meaning and objecthood. What remained was the reality of language as a material object itself, and at the end of the poem, “unfailingly the blank returns, gratuitous earlier but certain now, concluding that there is nothing beyond it [*rien au-delà*] and authenticating the silence—” (D 236): “Nothing will have taken place but the place, except perhaps a constellation” (OCI 384-387). With identical first and final four words, Mallarmé constructed *Un Coup de Dés* as a circle: The throw of the dice at the poem’s conclusion coils upon itself to demarcate the physical site of the poem and the ineradicable *hasard* at the heart of language, thus “permitting infinity to be” (OCI 476).

In his important book on Duchamp and chance, Herbert Molderings expresses reservations about the significance of Mallarmé for Duchamp—while freely admitting

that the poet was “doubtless part of Duchamp’s intellectual ammunition”; the “metaphysical significance that Mallarmé attached to chance” was, he argues, replaced in Duchamp’s work by an insistence on humor, a “scientific world model,” and an aesthetic “centered around the notion of the ‘possible.’”⁶⁸ Yet, I will argue that the terrain of the “possible,” which is to say, the hypothetical or potential, is precisely the terrain on which to link Duchamp to Mallarmé’s attempt to secularize the absolute by suspending the affirmation or negation of chance. Indeed, in an unpublished letter, Duchamp wrote to André Breton in 1952, “I never agree to discussions about the existence of God—this means that even the term ‘atheist’ (in opposition to the word ‘believer’) doesn’t interest me, no more than the word believer does, or even the opposition of their quite distinct meanings. For me, there is something other than yes, no, or indifferent.—it is, for example, the absence of investigations of this sort.”⁶⁹ I will now turn to Duchamp’s attempt to construct in language and in objects precisely this sort of third option to affirmation or negation.

Duchamp was initially drawn to the post-romantic generation of French poets—what Bénichou called the “school of disenchantment”—with their central trope that the shipwreck of reason would be redeemed by art.⁷⁰ In 1911 Duchamp devoted a series of pencil drawings to three poems by the younger follower of Mallarmé, the French-Uruguayan poet Jules Laforgue, which were written between 1878 and 1884 and published posthumously as *Le sanglot de la terre* in 1902: *Encore à cet astre*, *Sieste*

⁶⁸ Herbert Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 129-130.

⁶⁹ Letter from Duchamp to André Breton dated October 4th, 1952: 679 in Fonds André Breton, BLJD, Paris.

⁷⁰ Paul Bénichou, *L'école du désenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

éternelle, and *Médiocrité* (Figure 4.9). The titular mediocrity in the last of these poems is that of the Earth itself, described by Laforgue as suspended like a solitary atom in an infinite cosmic void, a rock populated by vermin dependent on the heat from a dying sun.⁷¹ This nihilistic, if rather juvenile, vision likely appealed to the then-twenty-four-year-old Duchamp; yet his proto-cubist illustration of a train and tracks that devolves into an abstract curlicue reneged on any promise to translate poetic motif into visual form. Already, in these drawings, Duchamp opened a gap between the visual representation, the poems' themes, and the sheer linguistic allusiveness of their titles (he later noted that he was more attracted by Laforgue's titles than by his poems) (DDS 166). The page of notations on *Un Coup de Dés* mark a shift in Duchamp's thinking that, indeed, mirrors the transition from Laforgue's thematic treatment of the modern decentering of the human intellect to the elder poet Mallarmé's work, in which this principle becomes *internal* to the nature of the linguistic sign.

Duchamp was not alone to derive a critique of Symbolism from Mallarmé, and to work for a conception of language in which words could become a material to manipulate rather than a neutral vehicle for thought. Indeed, as demonstrated by Nesbit and Naumann, Walter Arensberg did not merely lend Duchamp his copy of *Un Coup de Dés*, but was a collaborator in constructing this new use for words. In a typescript entitled *AVOID* from 1916, Arensberg wrote "Try for something like the mystery (not the symbolism) of '*Un Coup de Dés*... realism of mystery'" to which he added in pencil, "*Preciser* the indefinable (the vague which is not atmospheric)... Dislocation of

⁷¹ Jules Laforgue, "Médiocrité," in *Oeuvres: Poésies, v. 1*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1922, p. 23.

thought.”⁷² Supplementing his list of tendencies to “AVOID”—which included free verse, symbolism, romanticism, “inverted romanticism”—Arensberg added a list of positive possibilities for poetry:

extreme precision translatable word for word/breaking up of grammatical logic—the academic curve of sentence structure—falsification into logical or conventional sequence of natural insequence(chaos) of thought/Free association/Picasso Braque Duchamp irony of romanticism/Arrangements apparently (but not) free association/Duchamp’s juxtaposition of different planes of thought/Gertrude Stein How different from Gertrude Stein⁷³

To pass from a “vague” “symbolism” to a “realism of mystery” involved chiseling words from their syntactical and logical cement—similar to the reading of Mallarmé developed by Tzara—in order to allow a given sequence of words to “juxtapos[e]...different planes of thought.” Arensberg’s collaboration with Duchamp and his reading of *Un Coup de Dés* allowed him to supersede the belated Symbolism of his first book of poems, *Poems* (1914)—which also included translations of Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Laforgue—and attain the “insequence” of his Dada poetry, such as “Vacuum Tires: A Formula for the Digestion of Figments,” published in Man Ray’s magazine *TNT* in 1919—a poem that Duchamp noted in March 1919 was one of “the only things that we can read these days. (The rest is literature)” (AM 79). In a letter commenting on Arensberg’s “metaphysical quagmire,” William Ivins pejoratively remarked that his model of sheer linguistic juxtaposition bore comparison with cubist and Dada collage: “Today, [Arensberg] is what the French call a *verbomane*, a person for whom words are things to be arranged, just as some of the French of the period just before the war arranged pieces of newspapers and

⁷² Arensberg, “Avoid.” Folio 9, p. 4, box 43, Arensberg archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art. (Typescript corrected with pencil by Arensberg).

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 3

bits of rubber with old match boxes on a canvas and called it great painting.”⁷⁴ Arensberg would no doubt have approved of this description.

Arensberg’s second book *Idols* (1916) was mostly cut from the same cloth as the first—with the exception of “Autobiographic,” which reached for a cubist poetics inspired by Gertrude Stein.⁷⁵ Most interesting, however, is his inclusion of an extremely competent analysis and translation of Mallarmé’s poem *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, (1865-1876; Arensberg’s translation is to my knowledge the first in English until the posthumous publication of Roger Fry’s translations in 1937).⁷⁶ In the short essay devoted to Mallarmé’s “miracle of obscurity,” Arensberg emphasized that “the poem is a clear picture, always coherent and precise, of a mind humanly obscure to itself in the presence of natural confusion.”⁷⁷ The faun, in Arensberg’s reading, was a figure for the gap between representation and reality—what Mallarmé called the “*mal d’être deux*,” the pain of being two—a division allegorized in the faun’s vain attempt to discern whether a

⁷⁴ Ivins continued, arguing that this form of expression, “It was the natural result of having no hold on life and of life having no hold on him, of [a] financial, domestic, and social situation where ‘life’ means nothing. The whole thing is aberrational, a case of virtuosity carried so far that it has lost all meaning and validity.” Cited in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ This poem imagines the remaking of subjectivity along the lines of cubism: “A solid geometry/Of vacancy/Bounded by the infinite/Absence,/I/Foreshorten/To the end/Of me.../Walls and ceilings/Of my cellular/Isolation/Wrecked by perspective,/Habitable cubes/Of static.” Walter Conrad Arensberg, *Idols*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916, p. 20. See the commentary in Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse, p. 142-143.

⁷⁶ For Fry’s translations and introduction, see Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poems*, Trans Roger Fry, commentary Charles Mauron, New York: Oxford University Press, 1937. Beatrice Wood recalled the evenings spent at the Arensbergs reciting Mallarmé: “He loved the cadences of Shakespeare and with infinite patience corrected by intonations. We worked on Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and Mallarmé’s *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, first in French, then in Walter’s English translation. I was fascinated by the uncompromising time he gave to details.” Beatrice Wood, *I Shock myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985, p. 28.

⁷⁷ Arensberg, *Idols*, p. 79

half-forgotten romantic encounter with two nymphs was a dream or not.⁷⁸ Arensberg argued, “the remarkable duplicity with which every word in the poem is made to express a double meaning is an index to the ingenuity of such a mind in its attempt to reconcile the inherent contradictions.”⁷⁹ He ended his reflections by citing Hamlet, “‘The rest is silence’—a silence in which the dreamer and the dream after the essential separation, are reconciled at last in a common extinction.”⁸⁰ The faun, then, does not stand for the power of poetry to forge a secure link between sensuous reality and imagination, but for a principle of perpetual division, a loss of access or lacuna, which poetry activates as an arena for play.

In another note from 1915-16, Arensberg mentioned that Duchamp admired how, in certain poems by Stein, “words do not give this impression of serving in any *useful* capacity—as having any meaning in ordinary sense,” yet rejected the “element of *taste—gout* [sic]—in the writings of all these folk,” in which “they weigh the words—+ choose accordingly—weigh for sound, also for sense—to get a sort of balance.”⁸¹ This project to conceive of language radically autonomized from pre-existing or subjective relations of sound, syntax, or logic was at the heart of Duchamp’s “textual readymades” of 1915-16 and, as I will argue, of the role of chance in the readymade itself. This is evident in a note from these years, where he proposed to “research ‘Prime Words’ (‘divisible’ only by

⁷⁸ In the final version of the poem, the faun vainly searches his body for proof of the hazily remembered tryst, “Autre que ce doux rien par leur lèvre ébruité./Le baiser, qui tout bas des perfides assure./Mon sein, vierge de preuve, atteste une morsure/Mystérieuse, due à quelque auguste dent,” OCI 24.

⁷⁹ Arensberg, *Idols*, p. 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸¹ Note by Arensberg, dated February 1916, “Untitled essay regarding conversations with Marcel Duchamp.” Folio 17, p. 2-3, box 43, Arensberg Archives, PMA. Discussed in Nesbit and Sawelson-Gorse, p. 156-157.

themselves and by unity”: Duchamp would copy out only the “abstract’ words that had “no concrete referent” from the Larousse dictionary, and assign each of them a symbol that would make up the “letters of the new alphabet,” with a corresponding color to designate grammatical states (“substantive, verb, adverb declensions, conjugations, etc.”) (DDS 67-68). The result, as Joselit put it, was that the word, “stripped of its function as a means of signification, regresses into pure materiality” or becomes a readymade.⁸²

That Duchamp’s goal of formulating new relations between the materiality of words was forged in dialogue with Mallarmé is evident not only from his later statements, from the notes recording his conversations with Arensberg, or from the precious scribbles on *Un Coup de Dés*, but also from an important note dated 1914 outlining his “Principle of Contradiction.” This principle, he wrote, could be defined as the “Cointelligence of (abstract) opposites” that would “require abstract uncertainty, immediate opposition, between the concept A and its opposite B” (DDS 358). In these dense and cryptic notes, Duchamp argued for the priority of contradiction and contingency over logical consistency. Indeed, for Duchamp, the very foundation of logic—the principle of *non-contradiction*—was a mere instance of absolute contradiction, which is to say the moment when the law of contradiction *contradicts itself* to produce the appearance of stability. Explaining this idea, he outlined two possibilities implied by the contradiction of contradiction:

- 1) either, a return to a non-contradictory logical sequence (Plato...
- 2) or to the proper contradiction of the principle of contradiction: to an enunciation A one opposes B, which is no longer the opposite of A, but different. (the number of Bs is infinite, analogous to the combinations of a game that no longer has any rules) (DDS 358).

⁸² Joselit, *Infinite Regress*, p. 73.

If the first point referred to the apparent coherence of logic and physical reality, the second imagined a way of thinking in which two terms that are considered binary opposites (A and B), rather than being opposed, balanced, or dialectically sublated, are instead autonomized from one another and regarded as radically indivisible, incomparable, and unique. Within language, Duchamp wrote, if As and Bs are no longer defined in opposition, but are allowed to multiply to infinity then “this liberates the word from the definition, from ideal meaning” (DDS 358).

Following this anti-logic, Duchamp noted that the second contradiction of the principle of contradiction could, in turn, be subdivided into two stages. He associated the first mode with Mallarmé and Rimbaud, who substituted for the ideal and permanent meaning of words, a contingent “present meaning defined only for the moment by the imagination (auditory sometimes)” (DDS 358). In this model, words were liberated from the stability of signification, but kept their grammatical and syntactical “type” (“either substantive or verb or attribute, etc.”): “The phrase retains its skeleton (Literary examples, Rimbaud, Mallarmé)” (DDS 358). Except for *Un Coup de Dés*, Mallarmé, indeed, retained what he called the “guarantee” of syntax, while maximizing the variability of meaning for individual words, which would be allowed to fluctuate depending on the reader’s “imagination.” In Saussurean terms, the diachronic axis of language—syntax, grammatical succession, and “auditory” relations between words (structured by poetic meter for example)—would act as the stable skeleton to support the volatilization of the synchronic axis, where metonymic and metaphorical substitutions between words could be operated at will.

If this first model could be associated with the legacy of radical nineteenth-century poetry, Duchamp intended the second contradiction to the principle of contradiction to resonate with his own work. In this model, dubbed “Literal Nominalism,” words would further be stripped of any stable diachronic, grammatical, or syntactical relations, of any “generic, specific, numeric, distinctions between words,” to the point where no connection could be assumed to exist between “*table*” and “*tables*” or “*mangea*” and “*manger*” (DDS 358). At this point, Duchamp wrote, words would gain a “plastic being” “independent of interpretation” (DDS 360). Any three words set into combination according to this model—Duchamp gave the examples of “play,” “amyl,” and “phaedra”—would take on a visual or “physical” presence and a “conceptual value” independent of any pre-given structuring principle (whether of sound, logic, or syntax) (DDS 360). In this way,

These 3 words drawn by [person] X are different than the same 3 words drawn by [person] Y. –These same three words don’t even have a musical value, i.e. do not draw their signification from the ensemble of their succession nor from the sound of their letters.—We can therefore pronounce or write them in any order; the reproducer with each reproduction exposes (as with each musical performance of the same work) anew, without interpretation, the ensemble of words and does not express in the end a work of art (poem, painting, or music (DDS 360).

Duchamp’s “literal nominalism,” then, expanded the standard nominalist denial of the existence of universals—the argument that there is no pre-existing category of “greenness” apart from its instantiation in green things—to revoke the necessary link between a word and any stable meaning, context, or identity. In this view, the “same” word uttered by a different person, at a different time, or in a different place is not the “same” word at all, but a unique material caught in a moment of perpetual self-differing.

Each of these threads are drawn together in a work that Duchamp made in “collaboration” with Arensberg, *With Hidden Noise*, 1916 (Figure 4.10). This assisted readymade consists of a ball of twine screwed in between two brass plates, which were inscribed with a bilingual phrase, and linked by an arrow indicating continuity between top and bottom. Arensberg placed an object within the ball of twine, the identity of which was unknown to Duchamp, and secured it in place between the plaques. The phrase that wraps around the obscured object was an “exercise in comparative orthography,” as Duchamp put it to Schwarz, inscribed in English and French in large capitals, with certain letters effaced and replaced with periods.⁸³ Another phrase written in cursive beginning on the bottom plate instructs the viewer-reader to “replace each point with a letter→” (and following the arrow to the top plate) “conveniently chosen from the same column.” To read the phrase after replacing the blanks with letters from the vertical axis, one would have to follow the arrows from the bottom to the top plaques by turning the object in one’s hands, thereby causing the “hidden object” to rattle inside:

Bottom plaque:

<u>F/T</u>	I	R	<u>E</u>			C	A	R	<u>R</u>	É			L	O	N	G	S	E	A	→
F	<u>I</u>	N	E	,			H	E	A	<u>P</u>	,		<u>L</u>	O	<u>R</u>	S	Q	U	E	→
T	E	<u>N</u>	U			S	<u>H</u>	A	R	<u>P</u>			B	A	R	<u>G</u>	A	I	N	→

Top plaque:

P	<u>E</u>	G			<u>D</u>	É	C	I	D	E	S			D	É	B	A	R	R	A	S	S	E	<u>S</u>
L	E	<u>G</u>			D	<u>E</u>	S	E	R	T	<u>S</u>			F	<u>O</u>	U	R	N	I	S	<u>S</u>	E	N	T
	A	S			H	O	W	<u>E</u>	V	<u>E</u>	R			C	O	R	<u>R</u>	E	S	P	O	N	D	S

* The periods have been replaced with underlined letters from directly above or below.

⁸³ Cited in Schwarz, *Complete Works*, v. II, p. 644.

Therefore, having followed Duchamp's instructions, one ends up with language just as vacant and cryptic as it was at the beginning. *With Hidden Noise* should be read in the context of Duchamp's "principle of contradiction" and other experiments with language from this period that Joselit has classed as "textual readymades." For example, in *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* (Figure 4.11), Duchamp typed a text on four postcards, then glued together, in which he attempted, as he put it to Schwarz, to write "a text [that] finally read without any echo of the physical world."⁸⁴ This would be accomplished by retaining the "skeleton" of the phrase and correct syntax (as Rimbaud or Mallarmé had done), but substituting a principle of total variability and uncertainty as to word choice: "There would be a verb, a subject, a complement, adverbs, and everything perfectly correct, as such, as words, but meaning in these sentences was a thing I had to avoid."⁸⁵ If this work still resembles the poetic contradiction to the principle of contradiction, *With Hidden Noise* in fact goes even further to enter into the territory of "literal nominalism." The work's phrase, even if reconstituted and even if translated into a monolingual version, juxtaposed words according to "a game that no longer has any rules," or at least none of a preexisting grammatical, syntactical, musical, or semantic nature (DDS 358). Instead, the words gained a "plastic being" and became "independent of interpretation," as Duchamp wrote, a material to be manipulated by each reader anew, in a way that "does not express in the end a work of art (poem, painting, or music" (DDS 360).

In a gnomic phrase written on ocean liner's stationary while traveling to Buenos Aires in 1918, Duchamp noted simply, "The twine that surrounds the bouquet" [*La*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 642

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

ficelle qui entoure le bouquet”] (DDS 348). It is difficult to read these words without thinking of both *With Hidden Noise* and Mallarmé’s account of “the wonder of transposing a fact of nature into its vibratory near-disappearance according to the play of language,” discussed at length in Chapter One: “I say: a flower! And, out of the oblivion where my voice relegates no contour, something other than any known calyx [*calices*] arises musically, the idea itself, suave, what is absent from every bouquet” (D 210). Lacking access to the concrete materiality of the referent, poetic language points only to the “absence” within every bouquet; having cast every “fact of nature” into oblivion, what remains is the vibratory play of words themselves, which, “recovers, in the Poet’s hands... its virtuality” (D 211). *With Hidden Noise* could be read as an almost programmatic materialization of these principles: like a rhyming couplet, Duchamp’s line of twine, sold by the meter, wraps around an object that it quite literally casts into oblivion—the twine that surrounds the mallarméan bouquet. Further, in a perpendicular direction, as one follows the “lines” of writing on the plaques and rotates the object around, the hidden object rattles senselessly between the plaques: “an abolished bauble of sonorous inanity” (OCI 37).

The end goal of Mallarmé’s poetry was for words to appear subtracted from their everyday usage, rescued from their entropic “thermodynamic” tendency to become clichés, as Bois puts it, and to shine materially as though “foreign to the language” (D 211).⁸⁶ This model was at the heart of the Russian Futurist conception of linguistic *Faktura* that culminated in Velimir Khlebnikov’s and Aleksandr Kruchenykh’s achievement of a “self-sufficient (self-centered) Word,” which, as Maria Gough

⁸⁶ See the illuminating discussion of Mallarmé’s “je dis: une fleur!” and Ed Ruscha’s treatment of words. Yve-Alain Bois, “Thermometers Should Last Forever,” *October* 111 (Winter 2005), pp. 64-67.

described it, was conceived as “a phonic and graphic entity devoid of any referent, an object in itself.”⁸⁷ If, “after a certain time, the meaning of words is more or less static,” Roman Jakobson contended, the “semantic and phonetic deformation of the poetic word” had the potential to estrange words to the point that “what Husserl called the *dinglicher Bezug* [objecthood of the referent] is absent. (To a certain extent no poetic word has a referent. A certain French poet believed this who wrote that the poetic flower is *l’absente de tous bouquets.*)”⁸⁸ For Mallarmé, the creation of a “Verse, which, out of several vocables, makes a total word, entirely new” gave the impression of “negating, with a sovereign blow, despite their repeated reformulations between sound and sense, the arbitrariness [*le hasard*] that remains in the terms” (D 211). By constructing verse out of most arbitrary facets of language, the poet produced the momentary “fiction” that the referent had simply disappeared to reveal the novelty of language as an object in and for itself. Estranged from its referent, the linguistic object would, in the poet’s hands, maintain with itself a virtual infinity of “reformulations between sound and sense”: the poet therefore hypothetically “negates chance” by holding it in reserve, leaving it to the reader to cast their own throws of the dice in the act of interpretation.

Not tempted by the neologism like the Russian Futurists, Duchamp’s meditations on the dereferentialization of language led him, like Mallarmé, to a concept of “canned chance” [*du hasard en conserve*] as he put it in a note from 1914 (DDS 69). The earliest and most important work to emerge from this conjunction is the *Three Standard*

⁸⁷ See Maria Gough’s important discussion of the place of “Faktura” within the materialist poetics of the Russian Futurists. Maria Gough “Faktura: the Making of the Russian Avant-Garde,” *RES* n. 36 (Autumn 1999): p. 35-38.

⁸⁸ Roman Jakobson, “Fragments de ‘la nouvelle poésie russe,’” in *Huit questions de poétique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977, p. 24-25

Stoppages from 1913, (Figure 4.12) about which Benjamin Buchloh suggested, “there is no work that more effectively picks up the Mallarméan legacy in cubism and redefines it.”⁸⁹ In the *Three Standard Stoppages*, Duchamp’s experimental activity consisted in dropping three identical meter-long threads from a height of one meter and preserving the resulting “deformity” by fixing the thread to canvas and incising their curved shapes into wooden “meter sticks.” In the *Stoppages*, as in the sewn thread of *Chocolate Grinder II*, 1914, and the ball of twine in *With Hidden Noise*, Duchamp used string to “depersonalize” the line (whether through chance or through the mechanization of gesture) and to “forget with [his] hand.”⁹⁰

As Julia Robinson has suggested, Duchamp’s subjection of the “mètre” to the deformations of chance may have had more than a homonymic relation to Mallarmé’s figure of the “Maître,” poised to cast dice into eternal circumstances in order to realize the infinite.⁹¹ The *Stoppages* evince Duchamp’s concern to establish a relationship between chance and the “possible” or “infinite.” Yet, he did not follow the lesson of Mallarmé’s “maître,” who infinitized chance by refusing to throw the dice: for Duchamp, it was enough to carry out his aleatory action three separate times to escape logical

⁸⁹ Benjamin Buchloh in William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, p. 256.

⁹⁰ Molderings also points out that Duchamp, when profiled by the American magazine *Literary Digest*, submitted a photograph of himself in the role of embroiderer, sewing his *Chocolate Grinder* by hand. On the status of sewing for Duchamp, see Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance*, p. 20. On the depersonalization effected in mechanical drawing, see Nesbit, “Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model,” *October* 37, (Summer 1986): 53-64. Duchamp stated to Calvin Tomkins, “Mechanical drawing was the answer—a straight line drawn with a ruler instead of the hand, a line directed by the impersonality of the ruler. The young man was revolting against the old-fashioned tools, trying to add something that was never thought of by the fathers.... I unlearned to draw. The point was to forget *with my hand*.” Tomkins *Ahead of the Game: Four Versions of Avant-Garde*, New York: Penguin Books, 1968, p. 32.

⁹¹ This pun was noted by Robinson in the context of her investigation of the relation between Mallarmé, Duchamp, and indeterminacy in postwar Fluxus and Cagean works. See Julia Robinson, “Prime Media,” in *+1961: Founding the Expanded Arts*, Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2013, 15-49, in particular ft. 5, p. 43.

thinking's dependence on non-contradictory binaries (such as abolishing or affirming chance, or denying or believing in God). His decision to drop the thread three times in order to subvert the measure of the "mètre" mirrors his discussion of words liberated from the measure of "ideal meaning" to become "independent of interpretation": "These 3 words drawn by [person] X are different than the same 3 words drawn by [person] Y" (DDS 360). Indeed, describing the *Stoppages* to Pierre Matisse, Duchamp linked his decision to drop three threads to his desire to maintain the infinity of chance: "1 unity 2 duality 3 crowd—useless, after 3, to add the infinite series of numbers—this infinity is already included in the number 3."⁹² "The three experiences of the falling threads," he continued "encompasses the immensity of immeasurable possibilities."⁹³

While I have argued for a Mallarméan reading of this tendency, Duchamp himself pointed to a rather different source for his thinking of the radically individualizing aspect of chance. A note from 1953, first discussed by Francis Naumann and more recently analyzed at length by Molderings, produced by Duchamp for the Museum of Modern Art after their acquisition of *Three Standard Stoppages*, read: "My first use of 'chance' as a medium... a joke about the meter... Cf. Max Stirner—*Le moi et sa propriété*."⁹⁴ I turn now to a discussion of Stirner not only to investigate further what Duchamp might have found so provocative in this book for his thinking about chance, but also to return the

⁹² See the letter reproduced in Herbert Molderings, "Une application humouristique de géométrie non-euclidienne," *Étant donné Marcel Duchamp* N. 4 (2002): 159. Duchamp reprised this idea several times. In his interview with Pierre Cabanne, for example, he claimed, "one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest." Cabanne, p. 47

⁹³ Cited in Molderings, "Une Application...", p. 159

⁹⁴ Artist's files, Dept of Painting and Sculpture, the Museum of Modern Art, NY; first published by Naumann, *The Mary and William Sisler Collection*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984, pp. 170-71.

discussion to the key problems of the *Monte Carlo Bond*: the relationship between chance, competition, and work.

The anarchist and Young Hegelian Max Stirner's book, *The Ego and its Own* [*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*] (1844), was likely introduced to Duchamp by Picabia between 1911 and 1914, according to Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia.⁹⁵ The final words of Stirner's book summarized the aims of this effusive diatribe: "If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: all things are nothing to me."⁹⁶ Stirner's "individualism," thus, was based upon the "transitory" nature of the ego, and his insistence that the "property" of the Ego was precisely "nothing." In this, Stirner opposed his individualism to Fichte's position, which he summarized in the maxim that "the ego is all." Conversely, Stirner insisted that the "the Ego destroys all, and only the self-dissolving ego, the never-being ego—the finite ego is really I. Fichte speaks of the 'absolute' ego, but I speak of me, the transitory ego."⁹⁷ What Stirner objected to in Fichte, but also in Feuerbach, was the way that the category of the "ego" or of humanity always seemed to slide imperceptibly into an priori ideal, whether that of the species, Spirit, or "Man with a capital M."⁹⁸ Conversely, the task of Stirner's "egoist" was to "dissolve the spirit" and "to set forth nature as the null, finite, transitory, he alone can bring down the spirit too to like nullity."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Buffet-Picabia, *Rencontres*, p. 37. Molderings, *The Aesthetics of Chance*, p. 13

⁹⁶ Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, ed. David Leopold, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 324

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

In one sense, the link between the *3 Standard Stoppages* and Stirner is clear: for Stirner, the Ego resisted all attempts to establish the general or the rule—embodied in Nation, Race, Religion, Class, and even the concept of the Human itself.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, one could read the *Three Standard Stoppages*' distortion of the measure—the “mètre”—in punning relation to the slogan coined by Blanqui, “*Ni dieu, ni maître!*” [Neither god, nor master]. In this reading, Duchamp's proposal that chance was a means to depersonalize the artwork converged with a seemingly opposing affirmation of chance as a force of individualization. As Duchamp later put it, chance for him was a means to produce the irreducibly different: “If I make throw of the dice, it will never be like your throw—meaning that it's a marvelous expression of your subconscious.”¹⁰¹ When pressed on this issue by Calvin Tomkins, who insisted that John Cage, for example, used chance procedures to escape the personality, rather than, as Duchamp seemed to be suggesting, as a manifestation of the “subconscious,” Duchamp stated, “The duty of chance is to express what is unique and indeterminate about us beyond the rational.”¹⁰²

While Duchamp later stated that “to individualize, to singularize, is what every artist should do instead of going toward mass production as we do today,” it would be

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66

¹⁰⁰ Molderings, for example, links Duchamp's thinking on chance to Stirner's rejection of authority: “In Duchamp's thinking, however, the world *is* ruled by chance, and therefore such notions as law, harmony, and beauty are obsolete, both with regard to nature and with regard to art. The latter becomes a ‘play of the mind’ that obeys the rules not of a rational logic but of an imaginative one.” Molderings, *The Aesthetics of Chance*, p. 141.

¹⁰¹ “And so an action like throwing dice to find the notes of a piece of music was nevertheless a subconscious expression of myself” Tomkins, *The Afternoon Interviews*, p. 51 Likewise, in his 1964 lecture *A propos of myself*, he stated about *Three Standard Stoppages*, “This experiment was made... to imprison and preserve forms obtained through chance... through *my* chance” (DDS 210).

¹⁰² Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, p. 53. Duchamp's rejection of Dada and its stance of negativity, for example, took a similar form: “Dada was a negation and a protest. I was not particularly interested in it. One's own ‘no’ merely makes one dependent on what one negates.” Cited in Molderings, *The Aesthetics of Chance*, p. 128)

misguided to link this to a libertarian affirmation of the heroic individual.¹⁰³ Duchamp, rather, rooted the very notion of subjectivity, not in the self-directed Ego, but in the unpredictable and unrepeatable infinity of chance, which undoes any stable ground of being. As he later put it, “[Stirner’s book] is just a series of repetitions like litanies about the ego being always there in everything, in spite of yourself. ... It is not a theory, an economic theory at all... He absolutely didn’t tell you what to do or shouldn’t do. He just told you that it was like this. He didn’t even say, ‘It was.’ He never even used the verb ‘to be.’”¹⁰⁴

Yet, every time that Stirner discussed chance, the arbitrary, or contingency, it was with strikingly negative connotations. For Stirner, “political liberalism,” by which he meant the social ideology resulting from the bourgeois revolutions, released human society from the hierarchy of aristocratic status, but turned it over in the same gesture to the arbitrariness of the market. In capitalist society, as Stirner described it, all citizens are equal before the law, so those who succeed in the reign of total competition are perceived as “favored by fortune,” while the suffering of the majority is because they are “unfortunate.”¹⁰⁵ As Stirner put it,

Competition, in which alone civil and political life unrolls itself, is a game of luck through and through, from the speculations of the exchange down to the solicitation of offices, the hunt for customers, looking for work, aspiring to promotion and decorations, the second-hand dealer’s petty haggling, etc. If one succeeds in supplanting and outbidding his rivals, then the ‘lucky throw’ is made.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Francis Roberts, “I propose to strain the laws of physics,” *Art news* v. 67, n. 8 (December 1968): p. 47

¹⁰⁴ Unpublished Interview with Harriet and Carroll Janis, with the participation of Sidney Janis, NY, 1953. Cited in Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost*, p. 357-8.

¹⁰⁵ Stirner, p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

For Stirner, then, chance played a key ideological function for capitalism as a means to mystify systematic exploitation: since all individuals are formally equal, all have an equal shot of landing a “lucky throw.” However, in a gesture of disavowal, the mythical centrality of chance to the capitalist universe—from the “speculations of the exchange” down to the laborer searching for any form of work to survive—required gambling to be punished as a vice:

And now those who ply their daily lives in the midst of these changes of fortune without seeing any harm in it are seized with the most virtuous indignation when their own principle appears in naked form and ‘breeds misfortune’ as - gambling. Gambling, you see, is too clear, too barefaced a competition, and, like every decided nakedness, offends honourable modesty.¹⁰⁷

As the strongest form of opposition to capitalism, socialism, Stirner argued, therefore sought to abolish chance and establish a planned economy: “The socialists want to put a stop to this activity of chance, and to form a society in which men are no longer dependent on fortune, but free.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, Stirner argued, while capitalism subjected humanity to the reign of the dice throw, the socialist abolition of private property destroyed the individual for the sake of the general category of “humanity,” which it construed under the sign of labor. According to Stirner, socialism’s motto proclaimed, “It is labor that constitutes our dignity and our equality.”¹⁰⁹ In abolishing the chance of the market that maintains the formal “freedom” of humanity while dividing humans into fortunates and unfortunates, and in substituting labor as the nature of humanity, socialism, for Stirner, was equally opposed to the free development of the Ego. For the

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 107

socialist yokes the human to the structure of work even more firmly than the capitalist: “If you were a ‘lazybones,’ he [the socialist] would not indeed fail to recognize the man in you, but would endeavor to cleanse him as a ‘lazy man’ from laziness and to convert you to the faith that labour is man's ‘destiny and calling.’”¹¹⁰ This, for Stirner, was the root of socialism’s sublimated religiosity, which measured humanity’s worth according to the abstract absolute of labor. Stirner, conversely, rejected the notion that labor was the origin and telos of humanity and insisted on the nebulous negativity of the individual’s self-directed action.

Marx critiqued “Saint Max,” as Karl Löwith summarizes, because, “Stirner absolutizes bourgeois egoism, the private individual, and private ownership, making them into general ‘categories’ of egoism, the individual, and ownership.... he is the most radical ideologist of bourgeois society, which is per se a society of ‘isolated individuals’”¹¹¹ Likewise, it is hard to imagine Duchamp siding with the Egoist against the Human in this key formulation by Stirner: “But, if every door is to be bolted against egoism, it would be necessary to strive after completely ‘disinterested’ action, total disinterestedness. This alone is human, because only man is disinterested, the egoist always interested.”¹¹² As Duchamp later described his principle of indifference, when asked if the readymade was a principle of anti-art: “No, the word ‘anti’ annoys me a little, because whether you’re anti or not, it’s two sides of the same thing. And I would like to be completely—I don’t know what you say—nonexistent, instead of being for or

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹¹¹ Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Trans. David E. Green, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 248. See the length discussion of Stirner, where he is savaged as “Saint Max” or “Saint Sancho” in Marx and Engels, *The German ideology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, pp. 128-478.

¹¹² Stirner, p. 113.

against.”¹¹³ Duchamp brought up the *Three Standard Stoppages*, “the one that I love the most,” and stated “I was satisfied with the idea of not having been responsible for the form taken by chance.” Further, “[The public] think everything has to be done on purpose by complete deliberation, and so forth. In time they will come to accept chance as a possibility to produce things. In fact, the whole world is based on chance, or at least chance is a definition of what happens in the world we live in and know more than any causality.”¹¹⁴ Here, then, Duchamp associated chance with a form of action or reflection that did not seek to have a causal effect in the world, which admitted of no responsibility for “ends” or “results,” and which certainly could not be controlled by the interested ego.

In Stirner, therefore, Duchamp would have encountered opposed yet complementary social imaginaries based on the reign of chance in the market and the idealization of work as the human essence. As I will show in the following sections, these are precisely the terms that Duchamp’s *Monte Carlo Bond* sought to sublimate: first, by rejecting work and prizing laziness; and, second, by mimicking the disavowed link between gambling and capitalism in his financial document.

Excursus on the Abolition of Work

Il faut un certain ‘communisme’ sentimentale.
—Henri-Pierre Roché, *Victor*¹¹⁵

The *Monte Carlo Bond* is the site where the status of work in Duchamp’s life reaches its most intense contradiction. Duchamp consistently staked his art under the

¹¹³ Francis Roberts, p. 62

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 63

¹¹⁵ Henri-Pierre Roché, *Victor (Marcel Duchamp): Roman*. v. 3 of *Marcel Duchamp*, Paris: Centre national d’art et de culture Georges Pompidou, 1977, p. 53.

banner of a refusal of “work” and a valorization of laziness. This desire to uncouple the production of a work of art from manual labor, and to engage in forms of labor that would not produce objects—to “make works [*oeuvres*] that are not ‘art’”—was specifically rooted, for Duchamp, in the desire to divorce art from remuneration (DDS 111). As he later recalled, following his sojourn in Munich in 1912, he thought, “Marcel, no more painting; go get a job.” But, he immediately added, his search for employment was driven by his desire to avoid the fate of “the professional painter... integrated into society.” Indeed, he stated, “I didn’t want to depend on my painting for a living,” and therefore, he sought work in order to become a “freelance artist, who has no obligations” (DDS 174).¹¹⁶ So, from this rather pragmatic perspective, Duchamp’s drive to secure unartistic work for himself to make money—filing books at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris or giving French lessons in New York, or, later, with the greatest paradoxical force, dabbling in the art market—was bound up with his desire to liberate the work of art from the circuits of labor and exchange. As Thierry de Duve puts it, Duchamp thereby “divides up the productive and unproductive laborers within himself.”¹¹⁷

Yet, the contradiction intensifies even further, because even as he attempted to secure a place for his art outside the market, Duchamp sought simultaneously to critique the special status of art within bourgeois society, refusing the religious veneration accorded to objects of “free” labor in a society built upon the compulsory alienation of labor for the mass of humanity. Seeking to “de-deify” creative work, Duchamp did not

¹¹⁶ Interview with James Johnson Sweeney. It is Thierry de Duve who has made the most of these statements, in de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp’s Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 15

¹¹⁷ De Duve, “Marcel Duchamp, or the ‘Phynancier’ of Modern Life” *October* V. 52 (Spring 1990): p. 68

take the Productivist route of collapsing art-making into wider productive relations, but rather, sought to sever the artist's hand as the locus of skill—to “forget *with my hand*.”¹¹⁸

The readymade is Duchamp's answer to the sort of art that could strip away the accretion of cultural and historical associations that lent the artist's labor a heightened social status commensurate with art's exceptional economic status: viz., the artwork as a unique object, the artist as possessor of an individual style, and the aesthetic as a realm distant from instrumental or commercial purpose. By proposing an everyday mass-produced and mass-distributed object as a work of art, however, the readymade inserted a minimal difference between itself and the wider world of commodities. The readymade artwork, for Duchamp, would, on the one hand, be indistinguishable from a commodity, yet on the other hand, be irreducibly distinct at the level of production, distribution, and consumption. Between the readymade and the commodity was what Duchamp called an “infrathin” difference, like the gap between an object and its reflection in a mirror.¹¹⁹

The readymade made its public debut while Duchamp was collaborating with Arensberg and engaged in his experiments on chance and language. At the Bourgeois Gallery's “Exhibition of Modern Art” in April 1916, Duchamp showed four paintings, two drawings, and, as they are listed in the catalogue, “Two Ready-Mades.” Duchamp had leveraged his reputation as the most controversial French painter in New York, following the scandal of the Armory Show, to insist that he would only agree to show paintings if his two readymades were also exhibited.¹²⁰ As there were no photographs

¹¹⁸ Duchamp: “There is also a philosophical side to it [the readymade]. The de-deifying of the artist. Of lowering his status in society.” Francis Roberts, p. 47. Tomkins *Ahead of the Game*, p. 32

¹¹⁹ In a note on the infrathin, Duchamp wrote, “Reflection in a mirror—or glass—convex—infrathin separation—better than partition, since it indicates an interval...” (DDS 280-81).

¹²⁰ See the discussion of the Bourgeois exhibition in Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 228.

taken of them, they are not mentioned in any reviews of the exhibitions, and they are listed as a single catalogue entry without titles, it is impossible to know with certainty which readymades were exhibited. In an interview in the 1960s, Duchamp recalled that the gallery “had put them in the entrance where you put your hats. Nobody knew what it was. There was no description, no denomination, no *étiquette* [label].”¹²¹ He also stated to Marcel Jean, “My ready made were exhibited in the umbrella stand at the gallery’s entrance.”¹²² This first exhibition of readymades, then, stands as the total inverse of the spectacular and scandalous entry of the *Fountain* at the Society of Independent Artists, Inc. eight months later.¹²³ At the Bourgeois Gallery, the readymades would have been almost invisible to the audience, risking even their infra-thin difference from objects of everyday use. If Duchamp showed *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (a snow shovel), as Schwarz claims without providing evidence, or the *Trébuchet* (a coat rack later nailed to the floor of Duchamp’s studio), as Robert Lebel claims, or the *Hat Rack*, as Francis Naumann speculates, these works, situated in the entranceway to the gallery with no identifying labels, would have disappeared into their utilitarian status (Figure 4.13 and Figure 4.14).¹²⁴

Not merely collapsing regimes of use, these “unassisted” readymades, as John Roberts has recently argued, conjoin two forms of quite distinct social labor: the

¹²¹ Interview with Richard Hamilton, R. Kitaj, Robert Melville, and David Sylvester, 19 June 1966, Unpublished transcript, p. 28. Cited in Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 228.

¹²² Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: Letters to Marcel Jean*, Munich: Silke Schreiber, 1987, p. 72

¹²³ On this familiar story, see Thierry de Duve, “Given the Richard Mutt Case,” in *Duchamp After Kant*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, pp. 89-144.

¹²⁴ Schwarz also suggests that the *Traveler’s Folding Item* was exhibited. Schwarz, *Complete Works*, 1969, p. 463; Robert Lebel, p. 40; Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 228. Duchamp himself later noted to Richard Hamilton, “Bourgeois Gallery show was April 1916. In the catalogue are mentioned only two *readymade*... without their title... I don’t actually remember which *readymade* were at Bourgeois,” in Gough-Cooper and Caumont, October 27, 1964.

productive, alienated, and manual labour concretized in the commodity and the putatively unproductive, unalienated, and intellectual labour of the artwork. Therefore, far from representing the nihilistic dissolution of art, or its elevation from the artisanal into the realm of language and pure ideation, for Roberts, the readymade is ultimately a challenge to the foundational distinctions of capitalist society: the separation of the labor that produces (economic) value and the labor that does not. In facing up to “the perceived phenomenological inadequacy of painting... in a world of hard, reified things,”¹²⁵ Duchamp arrived at a set of oppositions: between the complex skilled labour of the artist and the progressively enforced simple and fragmented labour of the industrial worker; the extended temporality of aesthetic experience and the immediacy of instrumental experience; the unreproducibly singular work of art and the reproducible mass-produced object; the artist’s ideally unproductive labour (which cannot produce surplus value) and the productive labour dominating the rest of the social world. As Roberts argues, the commodity was the opposite of the painting, and this is what drove Duchamp to present it as art.¹²⁶ Indeed, as Duchamp put it to Sweeney years later, “It was naturally, in trying to draw a conclusion or consequence from the dehumanization of the work of art, that I came to the idea of the Ready-mades” (DDS 175).

In facing up to the collapse of painting as a means of coming to terms with the world, Roberts argues that Duchamp “not only questions what constitutes the labour of the artist, but brings the labour of others—ideally at least—into view. Or, to be more

¹²⁵ John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, London: Verso Books, 2007, p. 23.

¹²⁶ Thierry de Duve might disagree with this claim by Roberts. For de Duve, the *Fountain* is closer to painting—more profoundly invested in it as an epistemological and historical practice—than Malevich’s *Black Square*. See de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, p. 154-159.

precise, non-alienated and alienated labour are brought into view *simultaneously*.”¹²⁷

Duchamp’s readymade—in presenting a rendezvous between the interior of art and its exterior—for Roberts, exposes the metamorphoses of labour itself. Duchamp inserted an aesthetic delay into the very engine of capitalist development, which is the incessant reduction of complex labour to simple labour in the interest of extracting maximum surplus value. The readymade, in Roberts’ view, installs a kind of “commodity-madness” where unproductive and productive labour, intellectual and manual labour, the reproducible and the unreproducible are suspended without resolution. It is in this “delay,” Roberts argues, that the readymades reveal their properly utopian status, because “it is in the space of the delay... that the naturalization of the abstract socialization of labour can be confronted, and the division between intellectual labour and manual labour be opened up to reflection. In other words, the act of delay becomes the measure by which humans regain control over socialized labour and the freeing of the intellect of productive labourers.”¹²⁸

In Roberts’ view, then, the aesthetic is *in itself* a model for liberated social relations. The work of art, as art, cannot be really subsumed to the capitalist production of surplus value, and therefore heralds “the emancipation from productive labour” and becomes “the central emancipatory terrain on which political economy is to be contested.”¹²⁹ Far from being nihilistic, then, Duchamp’s readymades, for Roberts, are

¹²⁷ Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, p. 25. Further, for Roberts, “the spectator sees—simultaneously—an absence of palpable artistic labour, the presence of the palpable labour of others [of workers], and the presence of immaterial or intellectual labour (the reflection, that as a spectator I am being called on to recognize the object in front of me as a work of art).” *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

“attached to the future transformative possibilities of *aesthetic praxis on social praxis*.”¹³⁰

Yet, to my mind, Roberts downplays the pessimism of the readymade in his conception of the work of art as the privileged inverse to the capitalist value form. Another view might suggest that the readymade manifested the necessarily restricted action of the artist in the face of the collapse of this Romantic conception of art’s irreducibility to the reified forms of labour governing the rest of productive existence.

The mediating term between the de-deification of art and the refusal of its assimilation into wider regimes of labor is, for Duchamp, the “right to laziness.” As he put it in a letter to Breton, “I am loyal to my external inaction; it’s unfortunately accompanied with a tendency to spiritual petrification due to the mediocre commerce decidedly declared to be of public use.”¹³¹ That is, Duchamp not only opposed the “mediocre commerce” of exchange, but also refused the notion that art could serve any useful function, let alone stand, as it does for Roberts, as a model of unalienated social production: “I have no faith—religious kind—in artistic activity as a social value” (AM 319) and art “has absolutely no existence as such, as veracity or truth of any kind.”¹³² What unites these claims is Duchamp’s celebration of art as a form of “external inaction” and laziness. “John Cage boasts of having introduced silence into music,” Duchamp exclaimed. “Me, I’m proud of having celebrated laziness in art.”¹³³

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³¹ This unpublished letter was sent by Duchamp on Christmas day 1949 to Elisa and Andre Breton: “je reste fidele a mon inaction externe; celle ci s’accompagne malheureusement d’une tendance à la pétrification spirituelle due à l’actuelle cormerie [commerce?] médiocre décidément déclaré d’utilité publique.” 665, Fonds Breton, BLJD.

¹³² Tomkins, *The Afternoon Interviews*, p. 55.

¹³³ Pierre Descargues, “Duchamp dévoile le *Cheval majeur*,” *La Tribune de Lausanne*, 3 Juillet 1966; Cited in Bernard Macardé, *Marcel Duchamp: La Vie à crédit*, Paris: Flammarion, 2007, p. 490.

It is clear that Duchamp's celebration of laziness in art was specifically oriented against the logic of work within capitalist society, which he would avoid and void in turn.¹³⁴ In a series of manuscript notes at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, undated but likely from the 1960s, Duchamp speculated further on the status of laziness, asking, "Who invented *equal exchange of value* which has become a law that is policed in relations between individuals in the contemporary society?":

The idea of exchange presupposes possession in the proprietary sense.... Would it be possible to live solely as a tenant? without paying and without possessing? Medals for voluntary workers—the most beautiful medals for the sanitation worker or the subway ticket-person. This brings us to the Right to laziness suggested by Paul Lafargue in a book that struck me very much around 1912.

It seems to me that today it would be worthwhile to call into question the forced labor to which every newborn is submitted and I have often thought of the creation of a hospice for the lazy where it would be forbidden to work. I believe in fact that there wouldn't be as many lodgers as one would imagine. In the regime of laziness it would be forbidden to work more than 3 hours a day.¹³⁵

In 1912, at the moment of Duchamp's abandonment of painting, which would lead to his preoccupation with chance and the invention of the readymade, he later recalled, he was taken with the idea of a society that would preserve a place for laziness, not as a heroic mode of resistance to capital (as in Roberts' hope for the aesthetic), but as a mere refuge for life. In a late interview, Duchamp again cited the nineteenth-century utopian socialist Paul Lafargue and his text *The Right to Laziness (le Droit à la Paresse)* (1883), and stated, "The title says it all doesn't it? It was a right, without your having to give an account or an exchange. But again, for me, who invented the concept of exchanging?...."

¹³⁴ For an essay on the refusal of work in Surrealism, which does not mention Duchamp, see Gavin Grindon "Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde," *Oxford Art Journal*, v. 34, n. 1 (2011): 79-96.

¹³⁵ Duchamp, "Unidentified Lecture draft," folio 29, box 2, Alexina and Marcel Duchamp Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Published for the first time in Bernard Marcadé, *Laisser pisser le mérinos: La paresse de Marcel Duchamp*, Paris: L'Échoppe, 2006.

Why should man work to live, after all? ... If you are lazy, and people accept you as doing nothing, you have a right to eat and drink and have shelter and so forth.”¹³⁶

In the book that so struck Duchamp, Lafargue, the Cuban-born socialist and son-in-law to Karl Marx, summed up the ideological mantra of work:

Work, work, proletarians, to increase social wealth and your individual misery, work, work, so that, becoming ever more poor, you will have more reason to work and to be miserable. Such is the inexorable law of the capitalist mode of production.¹³⁷

Lafargue’s text addressed itself primarily to the average proletarian, who, he claimed, had internalized the rhetoric of capitalism to such a degree that their very opposition to capitalism was framed in the capitalist terms of the “right to work.” Conversely, Lafargue claimed,

If the working class uproots from its heart the vice that now dominates it and debases its nature, it will rise up with all its terrible force, not to demand the rights of man, which are nothing more than the right to capitalist exploitation, not to demand the right to work, which is nothing more than the right to misery, but to forge an iron law forbidding anyone from working more than three hours a day, [if this is accomplished] the Earth, the ancient Earth, will quiver with glee, and will feel a new universe surge within her....¹³⁸

Lafargue sought to break this “indoctrination,” which he identified in the “dual madness” of a proletarian ethics of abstinence and work, which were at the heart of the labor movement.¹³⁹ On the one hand, the affirmation of abstinence was a means to claim and reformulate bourgeois morality for the working class and to mobilize it against the

¹³⁶ In his “hospice for the lazy,” Duchamp admitted one regulation: “The stipulation would be that you cannot work. If you begin to work you would be sacked immediately.” Tomkins, *The Afternoon Interviews*, p. 76

¹³⁷ Paul Lafargue, *Le Droit à la Paresse* Paris: Petite Collection Maspero, 1969, pp. 129-130.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

specter of the *Lumpenproletariat* (the drunk, the slacker, and the criminal). On the other, to valorize work was a means to differentiate the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, who parasitically lived off the labor of others, and, thereby, to construct a positive collective identity around which a workers' movement could be organized. Therefore, as Kristin Ross argues, Lafargue's pamphlet deconstructed "the most definitive and time-honoured semantic opposition of [the utopian socialist] tradition... between 'one who works and produces' (*travailleur*) and 'one who produces nothing and is a social parasite' (*oisif*)."¹⁴⁰ Lafargue, conversely, proposed that the communist revolution would base itself precisely on the proletariat's seizure of the bourgeois class' monopoly on laziness.

This mode of socialist thought differentiates itself from a tendency of Marxism that dominated the workers' movements in the twentieth century, which has in recent decades been described as "traditional Marxism" (Moishe Postone) or "worldview Marxism" (Michael Heinrich).¹⁴¹ According to this view, which became the official ideology of state or bureaucratic socialism, the expansion of wage labor and industrial forms of production across the globe had created the conditions for international class consciousness and solidarity based on a definable and affirmable proletarian identity rooted in work. This class, as it became conscious of the fact that it produced the world through its labor but was alienated from its results, would make a revolution underwritten by the very laws of history and come to self-direct and self-manage the production process (or so the story went). Labor, conceived as a transhistorical essence, was the

¹⁴⁰ Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, New York: Verso Books, 2008, p. 61

¹⁴¹ See the chapter on "Presuppositions of Traditional Marxism" in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 43-83. See also Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital [Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie: Eine Einführung]*, Trans. Alexander Locascio. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004, pp. 13-28.

philosophical and historical justification for this seizure of power, because the proletariat embodied its “standpoint” through its hard work, abstinence, strength and skill, which the capitalist class merely exploited for private gain.¹⁴²

Lafargue, conversely, opposed wage labor as such—in which the worker sells not a useful object that they’ve produced, but their labor-power, which is exchanged for money—and imagined the organic unification of production and consumption. Lafargue pointed out that the source of hunger isn’t a lack of resources but their inequitable distribution—a notion that Duchamp also echoed by asking, “God knows there’s enough food for everybody on earth, without having to work for it. Who made all those little rules that dictate you won’t get food if you don’t show signs of activity or production of some kind?”¹⁴³ To this question, Lafargue answered: the simultaneity of massive over-production and widespread destitution (among the very people who produce) was due to capitalist society’s orientation toward private profit rather than social good. Since the greatest quantity of labor and resources in capitalist society is oriented toward the production of commodities, which is to say, things made primarily for exchange and only secondarily for use, Lafargue wrote, “the great problem of capitalist production is not to

¹⁴² In “A History of Separation,” the Endnotes describe the basic tenets of “worldview” or “traditional Marxism”: “1) Workers were building a new world with their own hands. 2) In this new world, workers were the only social group that was expanding; whereas all other groups were contracting, including the bourgeoisie; 3) Workers were... becoming a compact mass, the collective worker, who was being drilled in the factories to act in concert with the machines; 4) They were thus the only group capable of managing the new world in accordance with its innermost logic... 5) Workers were proving this vision to be true, since the class was realizing what it was in a conquest of power, the achievement of which would make it possible to abolish class society, and thus to bring man’s prehistory to a close.” Endnotes, “A History of Separation,” *Endnotes* 4 (October 2015): pp. 97-98.

¹⁴³ Tomkins, *The Afternoon Interviews*, pp. 87-88.

find producers and maximize their forces but to find consumers, to excite their appetites and create in them false needs.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Lafargue continued,

European workers shiver with cold and hunger, refusing the clothes that they sew, refusing to drink the wine that they harvest, all the while those poor manufacturers, those fools, must search from pole to pole for those who will wear them and drink them: Europe exports millions and billions each year, to the four corners of the world, to people who have only to make them themselves.¹⁴⁵

Lafargue, it is important to recognize, phrased his narrative of the subsumption of labor to market imperatives in decidedly voluntaristic language—workers “refuse” to wear the clothes or drink the wine that they produce—while characterizing the capitalist as driven by exterior and illogical compulsion—he “foolishly” “must” search the world to expand the consumer base, while his workers shiver and starve. Lafargue insisted—unlike Marx—that such a society rested on the willing participation of workers, and berated them for the collective delusion that led them to pay rent for land and money for food, and, most of all, to sell their living creativity to the capitalist, the creativity that would allow them, if they only rose up, to abolish work.

Lafargue’s vision of a society liberated from the compulsion to work—one, further, forbidding more than three hours of work a day—politicized the aesthetics of Jena Romanticism. The very term “right to laziness” is likely to have been adopted from Friedrich Schlegel’s description of the “idyll of idleness” in his *Lucinde* of 1799, an unfinished and fragmentary text in which he wrote, “it is the right to idleness that distinguishes the superior from the inferior classes” with laziness being “the intrinsic

¹⁴⁴ Lafargue, *Le Droit à la Paresse*, pp. 139-40.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140

principle of aristocracy.”¹⁴⁶ To expropriate and universalize this principle was Lafargue’s aim. In Lafargue’s “idyll of idleness” the proletariat gave itself over to the consumption of their own goods and the enjoyment of their own time, and by doing so, approached the condition of artists. Mimicking Schlegel’s proclamation, “Oh Idleness, Idleness! You are the life breath of innocence and inspiration,” Lafargue intoned, “Oh laziness, mother of the arts and all noble virtue, become the balm of human anguish!”¹⁴⁷ In this way, Lafargue took art as the very model of unalienated production, in a way not unlike Marx, who noted that “Milton... was an unproductive worker... Milton produced *Paradise Lost* in the way that a silkworm produces silk, as the expression of *his own* nature. Later on he sold the product for £5 and to that extent became a dealer in a commodity.”¹⁴⁸

If the alienated laborer’s identification with the idyllic idleness of the artist held radically destabilizing potential, the artist’s claim to the right to laziness risked merely reiterating that society’s existing division of labor. This fact was sensed, as Ross has argued, by Rimbaud in his famous *lettres du voyant* dated May 1871, written during the heady final days of the Paris Commune. With parallels to Lafargue, Rimbaud expressed the desire to abandon poetry and in so doing to transgress into the domain of the other, stating, “I will be a worker: that’s what holds me back when a wild fury drives me toward the battle in Paris, where so many workers are still dying while I am writing to you!

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p. 66.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Lafargue, *Le droit à la paresse*, p. 149. For Lafargue, even revolutionary justice will take an aesthetic form: the bourgeois “moralists” who helped instill the mania for work will be punished, not through forced labor, as “work ought to be forbidden and not imposed,” but through casting them in theatrical productions about the “Theft of the Nation’s Goods” by capitalists and their overthrow by “Heroic Destiny.” *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149

¹⁴⁸ Cited and discussed in Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art’s Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical, and Marxist Economics*, Leiden: Brill, 2015, p. 252-254.

Work, now? Never, never. I'm on strike."¹⁴⁹ Rimbaud staged a contradiction, compressed into these few lines, between his desire to *become* a worker, to become precisely what he is not currently—"I is another" ["*Je est un autre*"] as his motto ran—and also to express a disgust for all forms of work.¹⁵⁰ As Ross put it,

It is clear that the *élan* propelling Rimbaud toward a structural identification with workers in Paris arises at the precise moment when 'work,' as such, has definitively stopped... 'I *will be* a worker': it is only at some future moment when the project of new social relations, a radical transformation in the structure of work, has been achieved that Rimbaud will be a worker; now, however, he refuses work.¹⁵¹

Rimbaud identified with the working class precisely insofar as they had ceased to work, precisely insofar as they had contested the centrality of work to their identity. Duchamp, likewise, paired his social proposal for a *hospice des paresseux* in which anyone might refuse work, with a parallel scheme for a union of artists. This organization, he imagined, "would deal with all the economic questions concerning the artist," including "deciding on the selling price of works of art, just as plumbers' union determines the salary of each worker."¹⁵² Duchamp imagined the union as the first step toward the abandonment of the artist's identity: "We can even imagine this union forcing the artist to abandon his identity, even to the point of no longer having the right to sign his works. Would the total artistic output controlled by a union of this kind form a sort of monument to a given era

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations and Other Prose Poems*. Trans. Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions Press, 1957, xxvi-xxvii.

¹⁵⁰ In *Une Saison en Enfer*, for example, Rimbaud writes "I have a horror of all *métiers*. Bosses and workers, all of them peasants and common. The hand that holds the pen is as good as the one that holds the plow. (What a century for hands!) I will never learn to use my hands." Rimbaud, Arthur. *Poesies, Une Saison en Enfer, Illuminations*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 124. Translated and cited in Ross, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵² Duchamp, "Where do we go from here?" *Studio International*, n. 189 (January-February 1975): p. 28

comparable to the anonymous cathedrals?”¹⁵³ That is, like Rimbaud, Duchamp conceived the artistic identification with labor in the act of unionization as the first step toward a work stoppage or strike in which the artist would become newly anonymous.

I would suggest at this point that the more convincing comparison to Duchamp is neither Lafargue’s right to laziness nor the romantic revolt of Rimbaud—whether on the barricades of the Commune or in his famous abandonment of art to become a merchant in Ethiopia—but the dialectical relationship between labor and the aesthetic established by Mallarmé. This was summed up in his response to the poet Camille Mauclair, who was indignant that Villiers de l’Isle Adam had been called a failure or “*raté*” by a journalist. Mallarmé, however, embraced the insult and asserted to Mauclair that his “credo” was “we are all failures [*ratés, nous le sommes tous*],” precisely insofar as they are poets. “What else could we be” he asked, “insofar as we measure our finitude against the infinite?”¹⁵⁴ If Mallarmé’s avowal of failure has been recuperated as a form of social withdrawal, it was bound up with a vision of art as a mode of production that was radically useless to capitalism. “Does literary existence... take place, in the world, otherwise than as an inconvenience,” he asked rhetorically. Instead, “the Poet... works with the gratuitousness of his product or his commercial disdain: doubtless both, knotted together quite simply” (D 271) The poet’s distance from commerce, in other words, was bound up with the “gratuitousness” of aesthetic work, which is irrevocably coded as

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ “The remuneration,” he continued, “is precisely to be a failure on a superior plane, which is to say, one who disdains immediate and facile advantages and measures himself against what dominates and surpasses us in every way.” Camille Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui*, Paris: B Grasset, 1935, pp. 100-104. Cited in Henri Mondor, *Vie de Mallarmé*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950, p. 665. On the social status of the *raté* in relation to the *blagueur* or *pasticheur* in Duchamp’s work, see in particular Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and avant-gardism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 136-141.

failure because it does not produce money—except in rare cases when the artist can “draw a subsidy from the *hasard* of fortune” (D 271). Excepting these rare cases of success, however, the vast majority of artistic acts, and certainly Mallarmé’s own, were simply “failed” or eccentric forms of unproductive labor within capitalism, suggesting the inevitable question, “What good is it to traffic in what, perhaps, shouldn’t be sold, especially when it doesn’t sell?” (D 225).

Unlike Rimbaud’s poet in revolt, Mallarmé’s poet is tied up in a knot, between the present uselessness of aesthetic labor (because it does not produce money) and its “infinite” uselessness. This led Mallarmé to conceive of artistic labor in a dialectical relationship to the alienated labor of the working class, which he explored in greatest detail in a prose piece entitled *Conflit*, published in the August 1895 issue of *La Revue Blanche*. There, Mallarmé recounted his confrontation with a group of railway workers descending upon his small home in the neighbourhood of Valvins in Vulaines-sur-Seine. Next to his country retreat, which he valued for its “solitude” while he “presides over its decline,” workers began laying down a train track, and, thus, “improbably, this spot appreciated for its decrepitude and uniqueness is turned, through the workings of progress, into a mess hall for railroad workers” (D 41).

Mallarmé described being “wracked by contradictory states” as his silence was interrupted by the sounds of labor. First, as a “noisophobic” he intended to “defend the property as mine,” protecting the sanctuary of the “dreamer” against the workers who tramped through his garden, argued loudly under his window, and blocked his way on his daily walks (D 41). Heading outside to confront a loud worker, Mallarmé immediately abandoned his plan as he faced the prospect of “having to lose to him first in a fistfight

that would illustrate, on the lawn, the class struggle” (D 44). Eschewing this sort of direct action to which he was ill suited, Mallarmé decided, instead, to recite a poem to the workers as they rested and drank in their moments of leisure. While his writing was met only with laughter when he read it to his bourgeois neighbours, Mallarmé hoped conversely that the working class would welcome his verses, for “these drinkers have a sense of the marvelous, and, after working very hard, they might imagine superior delicateness somewhere, and understand the need to break out” (D 43).

At this thought, he recognized a fact that “brings me closer, depending on my attitude, to the proletariat.” “Property,” he noted, “with all its proper and express usages, is closed, as the People would say, to the dreamer... I must have avoided it, obstinately, for many years—to say nothing of having the means of acquisition—in order to satisfy some instinct of owning nothing and simply passing through” (D 43). In this sense, although the penury of the working class is inherited and socially enforced, Mallarmé proposed a form of solidarity between the task of poetry and the deprivation of the laborer: not only does the bourgeois poet choose a path most likely leading to downward social mobility and to “owning nothing,” but the work of art as such stands as the other to the commodity and to private property. Possessing no concrete use-value, the poem also does not generate surplus value, and is only rarely assigned an exchange value.

Hearing one worker shout, “We’re all slaving here for the profit of others,” for the “bourgeois” who “want a railroad line,” Mallarmé felt a pleasurable distance from his own class, “Not me, in any case... I didn’t call you to this luxuriant, echoing countryside” (D 45). Yet, at the point of going down and joining the workers, Mallarmé was suddenly confronted “With the ill will and scorn felt by a laborer at the approach of someone who

apparently does no work” (D 45). Feeling this rebuke, ensconced in his home concerning himself with matters that are “nothing but literature” while the laborers below struggle and toil, “I feel guilty about my muteness, seeming oblivious to his situation, which makes me complicit.” He interrogated himself, “Maybe I, too, work?” “‘At what?’ echoes silently, inside, my conscience alone, ‘anything that might be useful to the general process of exchange.’” He then experienced “Sadness that what I produce remains, to people like this, essentially, like the clouds at dusk or the stars in the sky, vain” (D 45). Mallarmé encountered a seemingly irresolvable contradiction: any poetic solidarity with the “radical and democratic” struggle of the “hitherto ignored” classes¹⁵⁵ would have to be based upon poetry’s irreducibility to the status of private property and to the “general process of exchange”; and yet, by dint of its very distance from the world of production and consumption, the aesthetic is condemned (by false consciousness) as vain—along with other aspects of existence only imperfectly reconciled to the profit imperative, such as stars and clouds.

The next morning, Mallarmé awoke to silence, looked out his window and saw the workers resting, as though frozen. He felt at that moment that he could finally “become part of the swath of workers: whose mystery and duty I should understand, unlike the majority, and a lot of those more fortunate” (D 45). Mallarmé wrote, “Without saying what it is or elucidating this ceremony, they honorably reserve the dimension of the sacred in their existence by a work stoppage” (D 46). In this moment, Mallarmé noted, “constellations begin to shine,” and he felt his poetic conviction stir: “I will thus think exclusively about them, meditate on these symbols of the People” (D 46). The

¹⁵⁵ Mallarmé, “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet,” in *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874–1886*, San Francisco, CA: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, p. 33.

contradiction noted above undergoes a slight modification: looking at the workers in a liminal moment of rest, in a hesitation in the labor process, Mallarmé recognized that the solidarity of the poet with the People could not be achieved on the grounds of work—by asserting that the poet *also* labors—but only on the basis of its interruption for all.

Mallarmé ended his reflection on the proletariat with a vision of the anonymity of labor itself: “But in fact their births fall into anonymity, and their mothers into the deep sleep that prostrates them, while the weight of centuries presses down on them, eternity reduced to social proportions” (D 46). With respect to this process of depersonalization, however, Mallarmé felt, “the workers are, with the absoluteness of a ritual gesture, less its officiants than its victims” (D 46). That is to say, the destruction of subjectivity in alienated labor is emphatically not the same as the depersonalization of language in the “pure work.” The tragic deadlock reached at the end of this text is that of modernist aesthetics as a whole: the autonomous work of art’s sought-for impersonality stands in an unreconciled relationship to its “social proportions,” which is to say, the condition of exploitation that consigns generations to anonymity. Facing this condition, Mallarmé elsewhere put it, there is nothing for the poet to do but go “on strike before society.” (OCII 700).

To sum up: Art’s reconciliation with wider productive relations, its participation in “some overall recasting of social practice” (to borrow a turn of phrase from T.J. Clark)¹⁵⁶, was possible (or at least imaginable) for both Mallarmé and Duchamp only at the moment of a work stoppage. Under present social circumstances—this “tunnel” or “interregnum” (D 218)—only the “gratuity” of the aesthetic could be redeemed, only its “withdrawal” from use and its symbolic insolvency could retain art’s *promesse de*

¹⁵⁶ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 215.

bonheur. The structuring forms, metaphors, and models at the center of Duchamp's and Mallarmé's practices can be read as modes of figuring this gratuity in the present: the shovel or hat rack suspended from use, the (hesitation before the) dice throw, the hypnotic circularity of the spinning wheel (whether roulette or bicycle), the blank page....

A final structuring metaphor of the aesthetics of work stoppage for Duchamp and Mallarmé alike was that of gender. For both, the "gratuity" of the aesthetic within capitalist relations of production aligned it with the work assigned to women in the gendered division of labor. Mallarmé often identified poetry's lacunary present with the leisure time and activities of bourgeois femininity: for example, of the limpid movement of a fan he wrote, "As if for a language/But a batting of air/The future verse emerges/From a very precious lair" (OCI 30). Further, Mallarmé also quite practically sought to address the "future verse" to a public of women in his fashion magazine *La Dernière Mode* in 1874. In the first issue, under the pseudonym "Ix,"¹⁵⁷ Mallarmé wrote a defense of frivolity as the current mode of existence for reading: "They say there are no real readers any longer, and perhaps this is true; but there are women readers. Only a woman, in her freedom from politics and gloomy cares, has leisure, once her dressing is done, to feel the need to dress her soul as well."¹⁵⁸ "Given that a dramatic art for our own time—vast, sublime, and almost religious—has yet to come into being, and that these half-hour-long causeries of mine are no place to expound its theory," Ix wrote, "let us take advantage of this phase of existence we are going through, with its lack of a

¹⁵⁷ This would have been a subtle signal to those intimately aware of Mallarmé's verse, specifically of the *Sonnet en -ix*.

¹⁵⁸ Mallarmé, *Mallarmé on fashion: A Translation of the Fashion Magazine La Dernière Mode, with commentary*, PN Furbank and Alex Cain, New York: Berg, 2004, p. 30

present.”¹⁵⁹ With the arrival of the future verse stalled, the poet turned to the absence within the present, the “intimate ceremonies” of fashion. If, for Mallarmé, femininity was poetry’s gender in the present, with its patriarchal associations of vanity, frivolity, and fleetingness, these same pejoratives could be recuperated for the poetry of the future, universalized in opposition to the masculine valorization of labor and instrumentality.

Likewise, Duchamp’s adoption of the identity of Rose Sélavy was intimately linked to his refusal of the stable personality, of the heroic subjectivity of the (male) artist, and of the social requirement of productive labor. Duchamp’s refusal of forms of directly value-producing labor, and his assumption of forms of labor that are “value-dissociative” under capitalism, to borrow a term from Roswitha Scholz, implied his becoming-other and, in particular, his structural identification with the labor of women.¹⁶⁰

This is evident not only in his refusal of the phallic paint brush for practices such as sewing, but in his very refusal of work itself. If as Helen Molesworth has put it, in a society in which work is valorized as the very locus of subjectivity, “Not to work—to be lazy—is then to deny the full reality of human existence, to deny the category of the ‘I,’ at least the form familiar to bourgeois capitalism.”¹⁶¹ It suffices to note that the

capitalist “I,” the Ego of competition and industriousness, is gendered male. The challenge to the masculinity of work seems to be the lesson of Pierre de Massot in his

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31, 29.

¹⁶⁰ See Roswitha Scholz’s concept of “value-dissociative” labor in Scholz, “Patriarchy and Commodity Culture: Gender without the body,” in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, pp. 123-142. Duchamp later described his adoption of Sélavy: “En 1920, j’ai décidé que ça ne me suffisait pas d’être un seul individu avec un nom masculin, j’ai voulu changer mon nom pour changer, pour les readymades surtout, pour faire une autre personnalité de moi-même, comprenez-vous, changer de nom, simplement.” Cited in Marcadé, *La vie à crédit*, p. 218

¹⁶¹ On Duchamp’s refusal of work in the context of the Taylorist rationalization of domestic labor in the early 20th century, see Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades,” *Art Journal* V 57, N. 4 (Winter 1998): 61.

1924 publication *The Wonderful Book: Reflections on Rose Sélavy*.¹⁶² The back cover of the book featured a series of Duchamp's puns under the name Sélavy—including “Nous livrons des moustiques domestiques (demi-stock),” repeated on the *Monte Carlo Bond* that same year—and an introduction signed, “A woman of no importance.” The bulk of the book, however, was given over to a twelve-page calendar, with each page providing the name of a month in chronological order. Each page, however, was completely blank save for the name of the month, as if Sélavy had nothing but time to kill.¹⁶³

When Duchamp wrote the famously cryptic formula that “*Arrhe* is to art what *merdre* is to *merde* [shit],” he singularized the word *les arrhes*, which means a down payment, and repeated the famous nonsensical first word of Alfred Jarry's *Père Ubu*, “*merdre*” (DDS 61).¹⁶⁴ Both *arrhe* and *merdre* are dysfunctional words, with the singularization in the former and the addition of an extra letter in the latter rupturing the straightforward extraction of sense. Less often mentioned is the “grammatical” note directly following this, in which he writes, “*l'arrhe* of painting is of a feminine gender.” If I have just argued that Duchamp adopted his female alter-ego in order to contest the gendering of productive labor within capitalism, this note indicates a shift in emphasis. The financialization of painting, he seemed to suggest, would also imply the adoption of a feminine identity—precisely the link that Duchamp established by naming Rose Sélavy the President of the Administrative Council for the *Monte Carlo Bond*.

¹⁶² On de Massot and the challenge to gender binaries, see Paul Franklin, “Portrait d'un poète en jeune homme bi: Pierre de Massot, Marcel Duchamp, et l'héritage Dada,” *Étant Donnée*, n. 2 (1999): pp. 56-86.

¹⁶³ Under the page listing de Massot's publications there is also a heading “To Appear,” under which is written “Nothing.”

¹⁶⁴ See de Duve's analysis of this note in de Duve, “Marcel Duchamp, or the ‘Phynancier’ of Modern Life,” pp. 62-66

Pricing Risk: Interest, Value, Futurity

“Not a doctor to me not a debtor to me not a d to me but a c to me a credit to me.”
—Gertrude Stein “Next: Life and Letters of Marcel Duchamp,” *Geography and Plays*.

“The system is being perfected. Enchanting and economical.”
—Marcel Duchamp to Pierre de Massot, December 1925¹⁶⁵

To recall, in the *Monte Carlo Bond*, Duchamp produced a work of art that entailed his going into debt, in which the purchasers of the work of art are no longer collectors or patrons but creditors who (in theory) expect a return on their investment. With this model of the artist-as-debtor, the *Bond* inverted the relationship discussed in the previous section, in which art’s “gratuity” interrupted the mode of appearance of labor within capitalism: money. Far from going “underground” to hide from “economic fireworks,” the *Bond* advertised the promise of art as form of financial parthenogenesis at a fixed interest rate of 20%.¹⁶⁶

Duchamp’s bond was unusual or dysfunctional, however, in (at least) two ways: first, as noted above, no bearers cut the coupons from the bond to claim their dividend¹⁶⁷; and, second and more significantly, the bond did not circulate, which is to say, it was not traded. As Marx puts it, circulation is the very “life-process” of capital, the time “during which it realizes the value created in the production process.”¹⁶⁸ If the owner of a bond clips the coupons, receives their interest payments, and holds on to the bond until it reaches maturity to get repaid on the principal, fluctuations in interest rates are irrelevant.

¹⁶⁵ Duchamp “Quarante-trois lettres pneumatiques et cartes postales adressées à Pierre de Massot,” *Etant Donné* N. 2 (1999): 89

¹⁶⁶ Duchamp, “Where do we go from here?”

¹⁶⁷ Although Duchamp made two interest payments to Doucet, the latter’s bond remained intact.

¹⁶⁸ Marx, *Grundrisse*, Trans. Martin Nicolaus, New York: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 658

However, the market price of bonds is highly volatile and varies depending on the credit of the issuer (in this case Sélavy and Duchamp), the length of time until it reaches maturity, and the comparison of the coupon rate (20%) to prevailing interest rates (the price of a bond is inversely proportional to this interest rate). After World War I, France was in debt and the franc depreciated in value, yet in 1924-26 the economy began to grow and interest rates stayed relatively stable, fluctuating only between 3 and 4.2%.¹⁶⁹ This is to say that the 20% rate set for Duchamp's bond was laughably high. Rather than signaling a good investment, however, this high interest rate reflected a correspondingly high degree of risk. Indeed, Duchamp's *Bond* is what is called a "High-Yield Bond" or a "junk bond," which means that the issuer doesn't qualify for a good rating from the major credit rating agencies and so must offer a high interest rate to offset the likelihood that they will default on their obligation to pay back the investment with interest. If Duchamp's investors bought the *Monte Carlo Bond*, it was due not to the artist's creditworthiness or to diversify their portfolios, but due to existing relations of trust.¹⁷⁰ While most bond issuers are seeking capital to invest back into production—and therefore to generate surplus value in excess of interest owed—Duchamp invited his investors to gamble, quite literally, on the success of his martingale in Monte Carlo.

In the nineteenth century, credit money was a source of great anxiety, even among capitalists, some of whom viewed it as "fictitious capital." Marx cites a Yorkshire banker W. Leatham, for whom the shift to paper money authorized the explosion of credit.

Leatham compared the total value of banknotes in circulation in 1839—which by law

¹⁶⁹ On interest rates and inflation in France after the war, see Paul Krugman, "Currency Regimes, Capital Flows, and Crises," *IMF Economic Review*, V 62, N 4 (November 2014): pp. 488-490.

¹⁷⁰ On the status of trust in capitalist credit relations see Costas Lapavistas, *Social Foundations of Markets, Money and Credit*, New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 76-81.

were convertible into gold—to the actual amount of gold in the country and found an excess of 142 million in paper money: “It is impossible to decide what part arises out of real *bona fide* transactions, such as actual bargain and sale, or what part is fictitious and mere accommodation paper, that is, where one bill of exchange is drawn to take up another running, in order to raise a fictitious capital, by creating so much currency.”¹⁷¹ As one Charles Coquelin put it, “Everyone borrows with one hand and lends with the other... There is thus an incessant exchange of advances in industry, which combine and intersect each other in all directions. The development of credit is nothing more than the multiplication and growth of these mutual advances, and this is the true seat of its power.”¹⁷²

Indeed, the ascendancy of finance in twentieth-century capitalism, as Marieke de Goede argues, was not a linear process of increasing commercialization, but required great cultural and ideological accommodation (in addition to violence).¹⁷³ In order to win its status as a legitimate sector of business, finance had primarily to overcome three negative associations to which it had been linked in the nineteenth century: first, with unproductive labor, second, with femininity, and, third, with gambling. De Goede traces debates in her “genealogy of finance” that demonstrate how “speculators became cast as responsible, intelligent, rational, and masculine, in contrast with gamblers, who were

¹⁷¹ Cited in Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, Trans. David Fernbach, New York: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 526.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 527-28.

¹⁷³ See also Ellen Meiksins Wood’s critique of the “commercialization” model for understanding the origin of capitalism. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. New York: Verso Books, 2002, pp. 11-33.

portrayed as irresponsible, idle, excitable, irrational, and feminine.”¹⁷⁴ What unites all three critiques of finance was a moral opposition to “profiting without producing,” to the “unproductive” labor of women, gamblers, and speculators.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, as de Goede demonstrates, credit was often gendered female in the 18th and 19th centuries, with Daniel Defoe writing, for example, “Money has a younger sister... Her name in our Language is call’d CREDIT.”¹⁷⁶ The femininity of credit, in many ways, carried over from associations with the goddess of chance and luck, Fortuna, who, as Hanna Pitkin writes, was gendered “mostly in juxtaposition to autonomous human effort,” which was coded male.¹⁷⁷ We can likewise recall Casanova’s desire, with the martingale, to “fix fickle fortune” and his claim that “Love was still kind, but Fortune had quite left me, and you will soon see, reader, that men used me no better than the blind goddess....”¹⁷⁸ The speculator, like the gambler, sought to master chance, but, “is never safe from her temptations and the internal desires and weaknesses she generates in him.”¹⁷⁹ In moments of financial crisis these cultural tropes reemerge, with Alan Greenspan famously

¹⁷⁴ Marieke de Goede *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith: A Genealogy of Finance*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 84

¹⁷⁵ I borrow this expression from Costas Lapavistas, *Profiting without Producing: How Finance Exploits us All*, New York: Verso Books, 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Defoe, *Review of the State of the English Nation*, N. 5 (January 10 1706): 17-18. Cited in de Goede, p. 28.

¹⁷⁷ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1984, Cited in de Goede, p. 30.

¹⁷⁸ Casanova, *Memoirs, V. II*, p. 9; *Memoirs vol. IV*, p. 175.

¹⁷⁹ de Goede p. 45

comparing a financial bubble to “irrational exuberance”¹⁸⁰ and in populist critiques of “casino capitalism.”¹⁸¹

These three negative perceptions of finance at the turn of the century—femininity, gambling, and a parasitic unproductivity—were precisely those that Duchamp highlighted, embodied, and set into motion in the *Monte Carlo Bond*. He placed the joint-stock company under the directorship of Rose Sélavy, metaphorically bound to Fortuna; his bond, far from being a sure investment, was a literal gamble in the casino; and he did it all, he told his investors, with a sense of “delicious monotony,” working like an automaton or machine.

Duchamp’s production of a work of art as interest-bearing capital situated itself in the sphere in which, for Marx, “the capital relationship reaches its most superficial and fetishized form.”¹⁸² The question of the “mystery” of the commodity and its fetish, with which Marx opened Volume I of *Capital* returns in his discussion of credit and interest in Volume III: The standard formula of capitalist exchange involves spending money to buy a commodity (M-C) for the purpose of selling that same commodity to secure a profit (C-M’). With interest bearing capital, conversely, Marx writes, “Here we have M-M’, money that produces more money, self-valorizing value, without the process that mediates the

¹⁸⁰ de Goede, p. 39

¹⁸¹ Susan Strange is, to my knowledge, the first to coin the term “casino capitalism” in her book of the same name: “As in a casino the world of high finance today offers the players a choice of games. Instead of roulette, blackjack, or poker, there is dealing to be done--the foreign exchange market and all its variations; or in bonds, government securities or shares. In all these markets you may place bets on the future by dealing forward and by buying or selling options and all sorts of other recondite financial inventions. ... And the croupiers in this global financial casino are the big bankers and brokers. They play, as it were, ‘for the house’. It is they, in the long run, who make the best living.” Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism*, New York: Blackwell, 1986, p. 1.

¹⁸² Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, p. 515

two extremes.”¹⁸³ The simple commodity is a fetish for Marx because the source of its value in human labor is occulted with the result that a social relationship between people “assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things.”¹⁸⁴ This situation is intensified with money capital, which Marx reminds us is not only a means of exchange and a general equivalent into which any commodity can be converted, but, further, is a commodity itself: its use value is to produce surplus value and its exchange value (or price) is its interest rate.¹⁸⁵ Marx writes, “In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish is elaborated into its pure form, self-valorizing value, money breeding money, and in this form it no longer bears any marks of its origin. The social relation is consummated in the relation of a thing, money, to itself.”¹⁸⁶ In the autoaffective movement of capital, money appears to produce more money by itself, without any necessary relation to labor or even to the sphere of commodity-circulation. In “M-M’ we have the irrational form of capital,” Marx writes, “the misrepresentation and objectification of the relations of production, in its highest power: the interest-bearing form, the simple form of capital, in which it is taken as logically anterior to its own reproduction process.”¹⁸⁷

Interest-bearing capital, then, embodies an elliptical and belated mode of temporality, in which the source of an increase in capital appears to be capital itself,

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

¹⁸⁴ Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 165.

¹⁸⁵ “In this capacity of potential capital, as a means to the production of profit, [money] becomes a commodity, but a commodity of a special kind. Or what comes to the same thing, capital becomes a commodity.” Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, pp. 459-60.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 516

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

which exists “logically anterior” to its self-reproduction. In this way, “the capitalist production process—separate from the process itself—obtains an autonomous existence.”¹⁸⁸ For Marx, what renders interest-bearing capital a pure fetish is that it appears as though capital no longer depends on human labor in order to create value. For Marx, surplus value is identical to surplus labor—the labor time appropriated as profit by the capitalist beyond what is required to reproduce the means of production—and, therefore, encounters qualitative limits, such as human exhaustion and the length of the working day, which no amount of money can extend. Yet the “fetish” character of interest-bearing capital is that it perceives only quantitative limits, easily transgressed, and “like the growth of trees, so the generation of money seems a property of capital.”¹⁸⁹ With interest-bearing capital, it appears that money itself has gained “the power of producing surplus-value in geometric progression by way of an inherent secret quality, as pure automaton.”¹⁹⁰ Conversely, Marx writes, “We know however that in actual fact the preservation and thus also the reproduction of the value of products of past labour is *only* the result of their contact with living labour.”¹⁹¹ To summarize, interest-bearing capital intensifies the fetish-character of the commodity: In simple exchange, when commodities are brought to market and assigned a quantitative value, money occults both the human labor that went into the production of the commodity and also the qualitative difference between commodities as use-values. In interest-bearing capital, money is furthermore imparted with the power to generate more of itself unbound by qualitative or quantitative

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

limits. Capital, therefore, appears “pregnant in and of itself with a portion of present or future living surplus labor.”¹⁹²

From the left, Lafargue, the author of *The Right to Laziness*, also associated interest-bearing capital with gambling and a form of futurity based on chance. Writing in 1906, Lafargue argued, “Modern economic development as a whole tends more and more to transform capitalist society into a giant international gambling house, where the bourgeois wins and loses capital in consequence of events which remain unknown to him.”¹⁹³ Furthermore, the fluctuations of money in “the whirlpool of the Stock Exchange” or in the gambler’s wager are infused by capitalist society with the awe and mystery once reserved for the sphere of religion: due to its incapacity to understand the “phenomena of the distribution of wealth,” “the ‘inexplicable’ is enthroned in bourgeois society as in a gambling hall.”¹⁹⁴ The deeper rationality of the market, which serves to valorize value through circulation, is occulted and is instead experienced at the micro level as being based on the laws of chance: “The capitalist whose fortune is tied up in stocks and bonds, which are subject to variations in market value and yield for which he does not understand the causes, is a professional gambler.” “Successes and failures, thus arising from causes that are unanticipated, generally unintelligible, and seemingly dependent on chance, predispose the bourgeois to the gambler’s frame of mind,” which is to say, to superstitious behaviors and “magic formulas to conjure the Fates”: “One will

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Paul Lafargue, “Die Ursachen des Gottesglaubens” *Die neue Zeit* 24, n. 1 (Stuttgart, 1906), p. 512. Cited in Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 497

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

mutter a prayer to Saint Anthony of Padua or some other spirit of the heavens; another will place his bet only if a certain color has won.”¹⁹⁵

Walter Benjamin copied out this essay by Lafargue for his *Arcades Project*, and commented, “Isn’t there a certain structure of money that can be recognized only in fate, and a certain structure of fate that can be recognized only in money?”¹⁹⁶ In his essay “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” he commented further on the “phantasmagorias of time to which the gambler is addicted”: “Gambling converts time into a narcotic. Lafargue explains gambling as an imitation in miniature of the mysteries of economic fluctuation.”¹⁹⁷ For Duchamp, this dimension of futurity was a key aspect of the work of art: the “habit-forming drugs” of art and roulette are linked in their uncertainty and volatility to the fluctuations of the stock market.

However, one would not have to wait until the *Monte Carlo Bond* for an analysis of the conjunction between finance and aesthetics. Indeed, at several points in his work, Mallarmé proposed a comparison between poetry and finance on the basis of, first, their futurity and, second, the “fictionalization” or “virtualization” of everyday language in the case of the former and of industry in the case of the latter. Indeed, in the notes to the lecture he delivered at Oxford, Mallarmé wrote, “Everything is summed up between Aesthetics and Political Economy,” and ventured an attempt to “treat the motif whole.”

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 496. On the relationship of Walter Benjamin to Duchamp, it appears that the two met in Paris in late spring 1937. Benjamin wrote in his diary: “Saw Duchamp this morning, same Café on Blvd. St. Germain.... Showed me his painting: *Nu descendant un escalier* in a reduced format, colored by hand en pochoir. breathtakingly beautiful. maybe mention....” Walter Benjamin Archive, Institut für Sozialforschung, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt. Cited in Ecke Bonk, “Delay Included” in *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp—In Resonance*, New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1998, p. 102.

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and other Writings on Media*, p. 107.

(D 197) He continued, “The Truth, if one wants to work out the routes, orders that industry end up in Finance, as Music does in Letters, to circumscribe a domain of Fiction, the perfect comprehensive term.” Elsewhere, Mallarmé took up the relation of “aesthetics” and “political economy,” and noted that alchemy was the “glorious, hasty and unclear precursor” of the latter: “dreaming of gold, the philosopher’s stone... presages, in finance, the future credit, preceding capital or reducing it to the humility of coins!” (D 264) Mallarmé ambivalently suggested a parallel between finance and his own poetry, writing, “It almost bothers me to proffer these truths, implying prodigious, net transfers of dream, rapidly, and at a loss” (D 264).

What, then, did Mallarmé mean by “fiction” as the comprehensive term uniting his poetry with finance? Jean-Joseph Goux has developed a theory of aesthetics and economy based, in large part, on his reading of Mallarmé. Goux has correctly shown that Mallarmé opposed his own work to everyday speech, which he associated with a coin. For Goux, the key question is that of exchangeability, for just as “commodity-money can be substituted directly, through commercial exchange, for a material good, for a visible, tangible commodity” so too does “raw speech” “present itself as *equi-valence* or *re-presentation* with respect to the things it designates.”¹⁹⁸ Mallarmé’s opposition to a society that would “force [the poet] to recognize the thought, essence, in the residue, money,” was, for Goux, based upon an idealist “poetic Platonism.”¹⁹⁹ He argues that

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Joseph Goux, *The Coiners of Language*, Trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994, p. 101. Goux’s analyses of “symbolic economies” have moved to the center of debates about the avant-gardes in George Baker’s analysis of Francis Picabia. For Baker’s reading of Goux, see George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 12-15, 111-131. Rosalind Krauss also draws on Goux’s interpretation of André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* in her interpretation of Picasso’s *papiers collés* in Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998, pp. 7, 20, 76.

while “the speech of universal reporting would be homologous to the *circulating* general equivalent (in which two functions, that of exchange and that of reserve, are combined), [Mallarmé’s] ‘essential speech’, which refers to the Idea of ‘pure notion’, would be homologous to the *measuring* general equivalent, in the ideal register of the archetype.”²⁰⁰ That is to say, Mallarmé’s poetry is to realist language as the circulating money commodity (gold or silver token money) is to “archetypal gold, immured in the temple, the standard measure that governs profane exchanges from on high.”²⁰¹ “The poet’s gold,” Goux argues, “is a valence of the idea, an originary metaphor that says ‘aura’, ‘sun,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘truth,’ and that is betrayed by the monetary cipher.”²⁰²

Mallarmé did, indeed, propose that, “In contrast to its function as cash, direct and representational, as the crowd at first treats it, speech, above all dream and song, recovers, in the Poet’s hand, of necessity in an art devoted to fictions, its virtuality” (D 210). While Mallarmé compared the “crisis of verse” occasioned by the loss of the referent to a financial “*krach*,” it does not follow, however, that he sought to put language back on the gold standard, so to speak, through a “Platonic allusion” to a “transcendent

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104-105 Goux cites Mallarmé’s “Un spectacle ininterrompu”: “Reality is an artifice, useful for setting the average intellect among the mirages of a fact; but it rests for this very reason on some universal agreement: let us see whether there is not, in the ideal, a necessary, obvious, simple aspect that may serve as a type. I want to write, for myself alone, as it struck my poet’s eye, such an Anecdote, before it is made public by *reporters* erected by the mob to assign to each thing its common character.” (D 23) Goux comments, “Here Mallarmé distinguishes between two universalities: a representative universality, that of reporters who assign to each thing its *common character*, constituting it as a *fact* to which *reality* is attributed: and an *ideal* universality, which refers to a *type* that only the poet perceives.” Goux, p. 105.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Measure,” as Goux claims.²⁰³ Mallarmé’s “fictionalization” of the “direct and representational” “cash” of everyday speech, did not necessary imply an Idealist move or a conversion to poetic “gold,” but a dialectical association with high finance. Indeed, finance is “fictitious capital” not because it is a delusion of bankers—or even less because they are Platonists—but rather, because, as Michael Heinrich explains, “credit money is a promise to pay that itself performs functions of money.”²⁰⁴ This is to say that even in the most basic acts of borrowing and loaning, money finds itself duplicated and virtualized: if someone borrows a given sum of money, the promissory note that they left with the loaner can itself be used as money. Therefore, both the original sum lent and the promissory note are in circulation at the same time. This latter amount of credit money seems to emerge “from nothing” and is then to be snuffed out when the loan is repaid.²⁰⁵

Likewise, for Mallarmé, the pronunciation of the word “flower” causes a virtual duplication of the referent as it is abstracted into musical sound and re-materialized in writing or speech: like a risky investment, the word and the referent gain a “vibratory suspense” for a moment “before they are extinguished” (D 235). Elsewhere, Mallarmé is explicit in associating poetic language with the virtuality and “volatility” of finance:

Sign! From the central void of the spiritual impossibility that nothing belongs exclusively to everything, the divine numerator of our apotheosis, ... does not take place in the fashion of any existing object: but it borrows, in order to revivify a seal [*sceau*], diverse deposits, ignored and floating according to some richness and forges them (D 167).

²⁰³ On the broader stakes of the link between Platonism and economy for Goux, see his essay “Monetary Economy and Idealist Philosophy,” in *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, Trans Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 88-111.

²⁰⁴ Heinrich, p. 160.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

This poetic “nothing that belongs to everything,” that “does not take place in the fashion of any existing object,” converges with the abstractions of “high finance.” Describing the “crash of a Bank,” in his prose work “Gold,” as the “effacement of gold under theatrical circumstances,” Mallarmé meditated on the incomprehensible gap between the sums lost and any equivalent value in real “existence”: “The inability of figures, however grandiloquent, to translate... If a number increases and backs up toward the improbable, it inscribes more and more zeroes: signifying that its total is spiritually equal to nothing, almost” (D 256).

Mallarmé’s ambivalent association of poetry with finance comes into focus on the question of temporality. The wager of a financial investment, operating between “the future credit” and the “preceding capital,” mirrors the poet’s attempt to establish their place within the literary traditions of the past by projecting a throw of the literary dice into the future from the vantage point of a present that “doesn’t exist.” To address this elliptical temporality of permanent poetic indebtedness, Mallarmé published a proposal to liberate young poets from work on the front page of *Le Figaro* on August 17th, 1894—fourteen years before the Futurist Manifesto occupied the same space. Entitled “*Le Fonds Littéraire*” or the literary fund—and introduced by the editors as a “curious debate that deserves the attention of authors, editors and readers”—Mallarmé proclaimed, “rolling through the centuries, poetic glory is not limited to splendor, but provides a sum of money that increases by generations—because great authors succeed through their books, which are sold” (OCII 322). These great works of the past make quite valuable commodities, he noted, with both rare luxury editions and mass-produced cheap ones adorned with “a specific and marketable contribution” in the form of “typography,

format, illustrations, all the ways that the taste of an epoch adds itself to the masterpiece” (OCII 322). But—in an echo of his description of the funds lost in a crash as “spiritually equal to nothing, almost”—he adds, “there is something, very little, *a nothing, equal to the text*, producing profit that does not belong to the bookseller—this is reserved, like a loan and, in all likelihood, a small amount escapes him” (OCII 322).

This “very little, a nothing” is simply the literary or aesthetic value of a text, that which cannot be fully subsumed to the logic of commodity production. Pointing to this quantum of artistic significance, Mallarmé proposed, “I want the tax authorities, or some legal guardian, to collect this, as a levy, limited to pennies and sufficient for a delicate and legitimate use” (OCI 322). That is to say, Mallarmé demanded that the literary work, when sold as a commodity, be recognized to carry within it some small amount that exceeded commodification and which, therefore, did not belong to the publisher or bookseller. This amount should be reserved and levied by the tax authorities, and then redistributed.

“To pass from this dream to the facts, via a few decisive words, as presented in the newspaper is necessary,” Mallarmé noted, “for success depends on this motion being presented in the Press to capture the attention of Parliament” (OCI 60). What he proposed was a mode of poetic redistribution depending on “a small adjustment, in order to clarify its sense, to the law that governs the Public Domain” (OCI 60). Everyone knows, Mallarmé stated, that fifty years after the death of an author, their works pass into the public domain and the income generated from their works is no longer owed to the author’s estate. “I don’t reject this custom,” Mallarmé noted, “but it creates a convenient exception, currently against Literature—that I would like to use *for literature*” (OCI 60).

The law in fact does not fully “suspend heredity,” but in fact makes publishers something like the heirs to the profits generated by dead authors’ works. If the *Phèdre* of Racine is still published in large quantities, while the *Phèdre* of Pradon is not, Mallarmé hoped no one would attribute this fact solely to “the profit motive, the acumen” of publishers. Nevertheless, under present arrangements, the “merchant inherits or claims, beyond his personal share, the intrinsic and public value of the work” which is actually due to the “accumulated admiration of readers” (OCI 60).

The “literary fund” is conceived to “interrupt” this situation where profit that is generated through the public value of certain famous works of art is “transferred to a third party, or several, with no legitimate claim.” Mallarmé pointed to a “peculiarity of the literary case” in which the “illustrious author never enjoyed any remuneration in his lifetime” for works that now generate profit for others. “If this benefit was taken away from the author” by a society that did not adequately value its writers, Mallarmé argued that it should now go “to those who continue his thought, those distant sons” (OCI 61). For “anyone who analyzes the mirage of immortality knows that it consists, outside the neutral salvation of a future crowd, in the cult revived by young people at the beginning of their lives.” Young artists and poets, “who rupture with agreed-upon careers out of zest, often encounter pain and hesitation: from who better to accept help than from their intellectual forefathers, to whom they owe their vocation?” (OCI 61).

But how should a society best “operate a transfer” (OCI 60) to its newest generation of artists? Mallarmé proposed that an office should be installed in the Ministry of the Interior to collect this tax: perhaps to be located in “the veritable palace of the Book, *la Bibliothèque nationale*” (OCI 61). This office would transfer literary wealth

from the booksellers to young writers via prizes for notable works or funds to aid getting a manuscript to publication. “Assuming the legendarily delicate sensibility of publishers” Mallarmé perhaps facetiously expected them not to revolt against what is “in the end, a rather minimal tax.” Rather, they may thank the state for such a state of affairs, which allowed them to “purchase at a modest price a praiseworthy situation” (OCI 61).

To an article almost belonging in the business pages, Mallarmé admitted in closing, he would allow himself “the displaced introduction of an image”:

The Public Domain of which I have spoken perfectly represents in the present case a public square or some public building. The site belongs to the mass of citizens: it belongs, in fact, to no one. One does not conduct trade there for one’s own sake without incurring a debt [*sans s’exécuter*]. The speculator who convokes the people on this common ground to testify to his hard work ceases to be everything and shall pay a duty [*acquitte un droit*]. (OCI 62)

S’exécuter has the primary meaning of being bound to an unpleasant obligation—but also carries subtle overtones of the executions of class enemies in the public squares during the Terror. This text makes it clear that Mallarmé’s equation of the aesthetic with gratuity—“*very little, a nothing*”—also entails a notion of publicity or commonness—“it belongs to *no one* [auncun].” The neutral Crowd or generic multiplicity of the human addressed by the *Livre*, discussed in Chapter Three, is associated with art’s financial nullity, against the speculator who celebrates private profit as an individualistic achievement that “testifies to his hard work” and operates “for one’s own sake.” Conversely, in Mallarmé’s view, art’s “diffusion to whomever [*à qui veut*]” which is to say to the generic mass of citizens or to a “future crowd” [*foule futur*], would be effectuated “first, according to a withdrawal” [*un retrait*].

As Duchamp put it, in almost identical terms, “The danger is in pleasing an immediate public.... Instead of that, you should wait for fifty or a hundred years for your true public. That is the only public that interests me” (DDS 174). These reflections on the futurity of the artistic gesture, conceived as a wager, led Duchamp to literalize the comparison with gambling and the stock market. On the former point, Duchamp wrote to Crotti on August 17th, 1952,

Artists throughout the ages are like Monte Carlo gamblers and the blind lottery pulls some of them through and ruins others. To my mind, neither the winners nor the losers are worth bothering about. It’s a good business deal for the winner and a bad one for the loser. I do not believe in painting per se (AM 321).

With respect to the stock market, Duchamp wrote to Stieglitz on July 2nd, 1928,

Picabia is one of the few today who are not ‘a sure investment’__ The feeling about the “market” here is so disgusting that you never hear anymore of a thought for itself__ Painters and Painting go up and down like Wall Street stock__It was not exactly like that 20 years ago, and much more amusing (AM 168).

If reception is always a matter of a temporal delay, shot through with chance, that separates the artistic gesture from its reception, in the *Monte Carlo Bond* Duchamp conceived this as a literal return on investment—one which may never be realized, and, in the case of the *Bond*, never was. While Jane Heap hinted that the *Bond* was a better investment as a work of art than as a bond, Duchamp may have conceived of the bond precisely as a means to escape the system of the art market. Indeed, Lydie Fischer Sarazin-Levassor—Duchamp’s wife between June 7th 1927 and January 28th 1928—recalled Duchamp speaking of the market with a degree of anger quite hard to reconcile with his public indifference:

[Art dealers] make their money on the backs of poor bastards that invest their flesh and blood into making something to enrich these gentlemen.

It's an infection. There's nothing to do about it. Writers benefit from their *droits d'auteur* for fifty years, proportional to the success of their works, but us, artists, painters or sculptors, nothing. We work only to enrich these men. Ask Picabia what I think of that!²⁰⁶

If the art market already resembled a casino or Wall Street, with artists not even able to collect royalties from their sales on the secondary market and thereby profit from a positive shift in reputation, and with no Mallarméan “artistic fund” or union of artists forthcoming, Duchamp's move in the *Monte Carlo Bond* was precisely to lay bare the relations of economic dependency.

In the 1890s, Mallarmé could seriously imagine that his tax proposal might be implemented by an enlightened democratic state and thereby reconfigure the “public domain” for the benefit of artists outside of capital. Artists who gamble in the present on future recognition would therefore be able to live thanks to a loan from those whose wagers had succeeded in the past: in this way, the discontinuity between the literary past and future would be closed to form a circuit. Duchamp's proposal to “eliminate the word chance” conversely, had no such sustainable end in sight, but inhabited the form of interest-bearing capital for its perfectly circular and auto-erotic nullity: splitting his identity between Marcel and Rose to play “a little game between I and me.”²⁰⁷

Duchamp's relation to finance and to chance can perhaps best be described in terms of this futurity and self-referential “equality” or “equilibrium,” rather than in terms of the Mallarméan discourse of “virtualization” or the moralistic opposition to the “gambling” of capitalists. As the heterodox (but not Marxist) economist André Orléan puts it, “What fundamentally distinguishes finance from other branches of economic

²⁰⁶ Lydie Fischer Sarazin-Levassor, *Un Échec Matrimonial: Le Coeur de la Mariée Mis à Nu par son Célibataire Même*, Paris: Les presses du réel, 2004, p. 44.

²⁰⁷ Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, p. 83.

theory is the fact that it has to do, not with individuals in their relation to things, but with individuals in their relation to time.”²⁰⁸ This is the case because a financial asset, from a nineteenth-century bearer-bond to the most complex 21st century derivative, is “nothing other than a claim on future income.”²⁰⁹ From the moment an asset like a bond is purchased to the moment that the principal has been returned with the agreed-upon amount of interest, a temporal gap opens in which risk, chance, and uncertainty reign. Neoclassical economics has developed, since the 1960s, sophisticated models for dealing with this inherent uncertainty about the future profitability of a given asset: “stochastic models,” for example, incorporate randomness into the modeling of asset values in order to calculate future prices with a high degree of risk and uncertainty. These models are integral to today’s derivatives markets, where traders not only need to account for random future fluctuation in prices, but to transform the risk itself into a commodity with a price. As Joseph Vogl puts it, “Only if the uncertainty of future prices (for foreign currencies, securities, and so on) can be offset by assigning a price to uncertainty itself will futures trading have the power to maintain equilibrium, control time, and confirm the self-regulatory character of the financial system.”²¹⁰ With great historical irony, many of

²⁰⁸ André Orléan, *The Empire of Value: A New Foundation for Economics*, Trans MB DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014, p. 175. I add “non-Marxist” because Orléan wants to argue for a non-substantialist theory of value, i.e., that value is not a measure of utility as the neoclassical or marginalist economic orthodoxy has it today, or of labor, as Marx had it, but is produced socially in the act of exchange. In doing so, to my mind, he over-“substantializes” Marx’s theory of value and underemphasizes his theory of money. For Marx, conversely, value does not measure a stable property or quantity of labor-time, but rather reflects the average socially-necessary labor time to produce a commodity. This value does not pre-exist the act of exchange as a substance; instead, it can only be ascertained in the moment of exchange when it is measured in money. On this point see, for example, Diane Elson, “The Value Theory of Labor,” in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, New York: Verso Books, 2015, pp. 115-180. For the purpose of this chapter, my reservations about Orléan’s reading of Marx does not detract from his critique of the efficient-markets hypothesis.

²⁰⁹ Orléan, p. 175.

²¹⁰ Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 68

these models are underwritten by computational algorithms known as Monte Carlo simulations and are based on the principle of the martingale.²¹¹

While having little in common with the martingale betting system that Duchamp deployed, contemporary financial models, like the Nobel-prize winning Black-Scholes-Merton model, also rest on the assumption of “equilibrium,” that key word for Duchamp. Such financial models, which are used for pricing derivatives, rest on the twinned hypotheses of the “efficient market” and the “random walk.” In the “efficient markets hypothesis,” the action of self-interested competitors, who are presumed to always act in the most rational way given the best information to maximize their profit, will result in a market where stock prices always reflect their fair value.²¹² This being the case, and economic competition being presumed to be a “fair game,” all future changes to stock prices are assumed to be the result of new and exogenous information. Because these future shifts in the price of an underlying asset are totally unpredictable—caused by circumstances that no one can anticipate—they are best modeled as a progression, divided into extremely small steps, in which any given step is based on chance and totally uncorrelated to the step before. Like the roulette ball, the fluctuations of price have no memory. Therefore, if one assumes the efficient markets hypothesis, it logically follows that by assigning a probability to each random outcome, these sophisticated financial

²¹¹ See Robin Kelsey’s discussion of the origins of stochastic methods in the postwar period, and its relevance for phenomena from the RAND corporation to John Baldessari: “Monte Carlo simulations run on random numbers. Because random numbers are difficult to obtain from seemingly random physical processes, such as radioactive decay, Von Neumann and Stanislaw Ulam developed a means of generating pseudorandom numbers—that is, numbers that exhibit statistical randomness despite being generated deterministically.” Robin Kelsey, *Photography and the Art of Chance*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 382, ft. 52.

²¹² See Orléan’s discussion of the efficient markets hypothesis in Orléan, pp. 182-190.

models can, if not anticipate, then at least account for any possible future shift in value.²¹³

Therefore, in the utopia imagined in economics departments and trade floors alike, as Vogl puts it, “the expansion and intensification of market activity will usher in a risk-neutral world, one in which an indeterminate future can be assimilated into the present since it is offset by determinable expectations about the future.”²¹⁴ This view was summed up by a stock broker interviewed on the BBC in 1999: “What a wonderful thing for exchanges to hear: The more we trade the better off society is because the less risk there is.”²¹⁵

This understanding of finance presumes an equilibrium of “fundamental value”—determined by the aggregate rationality of the market—around which prices will fluctuate at random, and, therefore, that probabilities can be distributed according to a normal or bell curve.²¹⁶ In the view of critics, even within the finance industry, this presumption of rational markets is unable to account for the cyclical emergence of truly unpredictable scenarios that lead to crash or crisis, which are dismissed as exceptions or anomalies.

This is the strategy of “collecting nickels in front of a steamroller,” as the statistician and

²¹³ Orléan explains that neoclassical model “conceives of market uncertainty on the model of weather forecasting. It assumes that probabilities estimate the objective variability of economic events, as though they were exclusively a product of the natural, intrinsic volatility of exogenous factors (resources, productivity, preferences, etc.) that shape individual decision making. Drawing up an inventory of all such possible states means, in effect, that even before financial markets open, the future is already written down and known.” Orléan, pp. 190-191. While the efficient markets hypothesis is a precondition for the random walk model, the reverse does not hold. For a good account and philosophical critique of the Black-Scholes-Merton model, see Suhail Malik, “The Ontology of Finance,” *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, v. 8 (2014): pp. 695-710.

²¹⁴ Vogl, p. 78.

²¹⁵ Cited in de Goede, p. 131 and Vogl, p. 78.

²¹⁶ For Orléan, “without a further assumption regarding the very existence of objective fundamental value, unambiguously defined, [the efficient markets hypothesis] would make no sense. Because this value is held to be logically prior to financial markets, whose main purpose is to furnish agents with the most reliable and the most precise information possible, the efficient market hypothesis naturally conceives of finance as a faithful reflection of the real economy.” Orléan, p. 183

finance guru Nassim Taleb put it in his popular book on probability and markets, in which systems like the martingale seem to diminish volatility but are prone to massive losses in the case of the unlikely event.²¹⁷ Indeed, like the martingale gambler who plays based on an ideal of equilibrium but is destroyed by the statistically improbable run of losses, the most significant factor in the actual long term performance of stock prices is not the regular pattern of small fluctuations around a equilibrium (that can be modeled according to a normal distribution), but large variations occurring in a small amount of time that lead to disaster and that remain unassimilable exceptions within the theory of economic rationality.²¹⁸

If Duchamp somehow managed to “stroll within equality” with his martingale, avoiding the steamroller of crisis and impressed by the fact that he was “neither ruined nor a millionaire and will never be one nor the other,” as he put it to Doucet, he also revealed one final dimension of finance: its self-referential dimension (AM 151). For Orléan, “Financial speculation may be said to be self-referential in the sense that the constant attempt to decipher the market’s opinion concerning the future direction of prices looks not to any standard of reference that is external to the market, such as fundamental value or utility, but to the market itself.”²¹⁹ In this way, although neo-classical economic theory proposes a “substantialist” theory of value as rooted in utility

²¹⁷ Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, New York: Random House, 2010, p. 205. Taleb characterizes the finance industry in which he worked as dominated by “‘conservative’ bankers sitting on a pile of dynamite but fooling themselves because their operations seem dull and lacking in volatility.” *Ibid.*, p. 208.

²¹⁸ See Taleb’s critique of the bell curve or Gaussian as it is applied in financial models in *Ibid.*, pp. 274-285. Orléan cites Jean-Philippe Bouchard and Christian Walter, who write, “In the Gaussian case, large deviations are so rare that the crash of 1987 (and many other smaller ones of which collective memory has lost all recollection) could not have occurred.” Orléan, p. 227.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

and demand—and governed by the presumption of efficient markets—the actual behavior of markets and traders proves that the price of a commodity or security is primarily determined by “collective market opinion.” In this “essentially mimetic sort of rationality,” the most important determining factor accounting for the fluctuation of prices is the expectation about the fluctuation of prices.²²⁰ From this perspective the solid ground of economic value in utility presumed by neoclassical economics is revealed to be a theoretical fiction. Market speculation is not primarily based on an evaluation of a given investment’s intrinsic value, but operates like a performative utterance that creates the conditions of which it speaks: something like Mallarmé’s “je dis: une fleur!” or Duchamp’s “this is a work of art.”²²¹

Responding to Pierre Cabanne’s question about his cryptic decision to substitute the word “delay” [*retard*] for “painting”, Duchamp noted, “The word ‘delay’ pleased me at that point, like a phrase one discovers. It was really poetic, in the most Mallarméan sense of the word.”²²² While the *Monte Carlo Bond* was never traded in the bonds market and so was never subject to the market mimeticism described by Orléan, in the “infrathin” difference between the bond and the *Bond*, Duchamp opened a delay: between the unproductive labor of the artist and the fetish value of interest to generate money without work; between the painter and the gambler who “sketches on chance”; between the probabilistic equilibrium of chances assumed by the martingale and the “absurd and

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Marieke de Goede argues not only that “money, credit, and capital are quite literally, systems of writing,” but, further, that finance should be considered along the lines of a performative: “It is thus that [stock market] performance and performativity are linked: the magical storytelling of investment opportunities (in Bre-X as well as in the new economy and countless other instances) performatively constitutes ‘real’ economic performance, in the form of measured international capital flows, investments, stock prices, etc.” De Goede, p. 8

²²² Cabanne, p. 40.

empty” equality of breaking even at roulette; between chance as a theory of radical difference and chance as a spectrum of probabilities; between the artist’s wager on future reception and the gambler at the roulette table’s bet on a win big enough to efface prior losses. From the readymades to the *Bond*, Duchamp’s fundamental aesthetic gesture was to insert a moment of Mallarméan hesitation between a familiar thing—whether a word, a hat rack, or a debt security—and itself. Even if art is “subject to declines and reversals on the stock exchange,” Mallarmé and Duchamp had both hoped that it could incarnate a form of “labor [that] cannot be paid by the product, because, perhaps, it admits hesitation” (D 220, 277). In this infinite moment of delay, thought emits its throw of the dice on the idle chance of gaining “*very little, a nothing*”—but a nothing that can’t be bought or sold.

Conclusion

Toute révolution est un coup de dés

At first fixed on a vine-covered tree, the camera slowly pans across a blank sky for several moments, before lowering to a brick wall carrying a plaque that reads, “*Aux morts de la Commune 21-28 Mai 1871*” [To the dead of the Commune May 21-28, 1871]. Pausing on the words for only a moment, the camera moves across a path to a grassy knoll opposite the wall, on which nine figures are seated, spaced regularly in a crescent formation. The film cuts to one of the figures, a man wearing a plaid shirt, who exclaims in loud monotone: “UN COUP DE DÉS... JAMAIS.” A sudden cut follows to an older man in profile who shouts, “QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES CIRCONSTANCES ÉTERNELLES DU FOND D’UN NAUFRAGE”; then, to another to a figure who adds only a mild “SOIT,” with a slight gesture of the hand. Next is a woman who continues, in a measured tone appropriate to poetic recitation, “que l’Abîme blanchi étale furieux sous une inclination plane désespérément....” The film and Mallarmé’s poem continue like this to the end, with each of the printed poem’s nine typographical variations—from the largest capitals to the smallest italics—read by a different person, isolated in turn by the camera, with cinematic montage taking the place of Mallarmé’s “blanks” to effect a “prismatic subdivision of the Idea” (OCI 391)

Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub titled their 1977 film after a citation from Jules Michelet, “*Toute révolution est un coup de dés*” [Every revolution is a throw of the dice] and filmed it near the wall in Père Lachaise cemetery against which 147 communards were shot by the *Armée versaillaise* and dumped into an open grave in the so-called *semaine sanglante* of May 1871. In their cinematic gesture of staging and filming the most formally radical poem of the

nineteenth century at a site that marked the violent suppression of France's last revolutionary upheaval of that same century, Straub and Huillet's film compares Mallarmé's infinitely deferred throw of the dice with an event that stands for both the most utopian revolutionary aspirations of modernity and its bloody failure. Perhaps the film proposes, like the Situationists in 1962, that as in the history of political contestation so too in modernist art, "the apparent successes... are its fundamental failures (reformism or the establishment of a state bureaucracy), while its failures (the Paris Commune or the Asturias revolt) are its most promising successes so far, for us and for the future."¹ The Situationists also remarked, "When a poem by Mallarmé becomes the sole explanation for an act of revolt, then poetry and revolution will have overcome their ambiguity."²

Yet, if Straub and Huillet chose Mallarmé for their film, it was not as a symbol of reconciliation between radical aesthetics and politics, nor because he was on the Commune's barricades during the two months of popular rule.³ On the one hand, Mallarmé's stance is incomparable to Arthur Rimbaud's direct identification of poetry with political revolt and his sudden abandonment of both; but, on the other, neither did Mallarmé propose a straightforward "denegation of the social," as Kristin Ross has it.⁴ Rather, Mallarmé's model of sociability faced

¹ Situationist International, "Theses on the Paris Commune," in *The Situationist International Anthology*. Ed. Ken Knabb, Berkeley: Bureau of public secrets, 1989, p. 314.

² Raoul Vaneigem "Banalités de base," *Internationale Situationniste* 7 (April 1962), p. 38; English translation in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1989), p. 97

³ Mallarmé waited out the siege and the Commune in Avignon with his daughter and pregnant wife. No concrete records exist of his opinions on the Commune, although his anarchist sympathies were well known. Paul Gauguin recalled sometimes going "on Tuesdays to the house of that admirable man and poet, Stéphane Mallarmé. On one of those Tuesdays they were talking about the Commune, and I talked about it also." Paul Gauguin, *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin*, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 70.

⁴ There is no evidence that the young poet participated in the Commune directly, and he likely spent these months in Charleville. Mallarmé recalls that Rimbaud, the "big oaf, cleverly passed himself off as an independent sniper for the Commune fallen on hard times, and his companions hastened to take up a collection for his benefit." (D 67) See Kristin Ross' argument for the structural relationship between Rimbaud's poetry and the reformulation of the division between intellectual and manual labor in the Commune. Ross, *The Production of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, New York: Verso Books, 2008, p. 71

an “interregnum,” a gap in continuity separating the arenas for aesthetic and political action, which was alternatively experienced as tragic loss and hope for reunion in a future public square, and which left the poet facing “a haggard crowd! It announces: We are the sad opacity of our future specters” [*Cette foule hagarde! elle annonce: Nous sommes/La triste opacité de nos spectres futurs*] (OCI 27). Straub and Huillet’s “funerary toast” to the Commune recognized in Mallarmé’s “withdrawal” its counterpart in an aleatory and asynchronous model of (revolutionary or poetic) reception. In order to preserve the potential for a future public, about which we can know nothing in the present, to “recognize itself, one day or another” in the work of art, it must be, on the one hand, addressed “to whomever” [*à qui veut*], and, on the other hand, written by “no one” in particular (OCII 414). Such were the stakes of Mallarmé’s “purity,” which Ross reduces to a syllogistic progression from the “fetishization of the poetic text” to the promotion of “the reification it sought to resist,” both determined by an “aristocratic doctrine that manual work... is the attribute of inferiority.”⁵ Instead, Mallarmé ceaselessly confronted the forms of “restricted action” possible for poetry under conditions in which language itself was and is a primary site of reification. Refusing the intoxicating present of Rimbaud’s visionary identifications, Mallarmé worked within and intensified the strictures of language with the hope of producing a gap of infinite indeterminacy. Rather than hastily proclaiming the reconciliation of poetry with life, Mallarmé sublated its failure: preserved it, negated it, and made it the motor of his literary productivity.

This dissertation has sought to trace the movement of such a dialectic within the history of avant-garde art. Picasso’s work in Cadaqués marked a hinge-point in the history of Western representation where the very fidelity to objectification, the desire to give form to what is

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65

uniquely “real” in art, led to the suspension of access to the world of beloved objects, people, and inhabitable space. But from this “sum of destructions” emerged a principle of semiotic mobility that, in 1912, would provide the basis for Picasso and Braque to once more seek contact with the social world in the *papiers collés* and industrial colors of 1912. This access, however, would be secured precisely by internalizing and mimicking the depersonalization of reification, by seeking to authenticate an aesthetic play principle within the most impersonal and anonymous medium. While the cubists staged a drama with the reified materials of social communication, Zurich Dada sought a direct confrontation with the collectivity through a barrage of simultaneous voices interrupting and drowning out one another. In this way, facing a fractured social totality from the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire, Tzara and his collaborators inverted the inherited formulas for the reunion of art and the people (whether Wagner’s or Mallarmé’s), seeking instead to present “fulfillment in its brokenness” (to borrow a phrase from Adorno and Horkheimer).⁶ Finally, Duchamp identified the most radical aspects of the Mallarméan aesthetic—linguistic non-referentiality, the universality of chance, the critique of money and work—with their infrathin equivalents in the forms, sites and practices of financial speculation and gambling. In doing so, he proposed that the persistence of the aesthetic as a mode of life and subjectivity irreducible to capital could only exist within the gaps of its most alienated social forms.

Mallarmé’s “failure,” like that of the Paris Commune, has indeed proved to be one of the most important dimensions of his posthumous reception. Acutely aware that the entirety of his published and private writing would not add up to the *Livre*, and that he would never succeed in drafting such a book—“One would have to be I don’t know who for that!,” he remarked—Mallarmé sought only to produce a “fully executed fragment” in order “to prove, by means of

⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 111.

these finished pieces, that this book exists, that I knew what it was I couldn't accomplish." (D 3) The sum total of his life's work, encompassing all of his poems, he admitted to Verlaine, "barely make an album, not a book" (D 4). As Maurice Blanchot, the author who has meditated more than any on the meaning of Mallarmé's "failure," argued,

Strangely, the future is announced, for this demand to hold back the Book—which will never be anything but its own holding back—seems to have destined him to write nothing but meaningless poems, that is to say, to give force and existence only to what is outside of everything (and outside of the book, which is this everything), but thereby to discover the very center of the Book.⁷

That is to say, Mallarmé essentially wrote *around* the unwritable work, elaborately framing the void of what would by necessity remain unwritten. The paradox of Mallarmé's work, to return to my introduction, is his realization that the dream of poetry becoming everything—of the aesthetic becoming the fabric of human communication and community—would require its becoming nothing. In this way, as Leo Bersani put it, "We might even define Mallarmé's major enterprise—astonishing as this may seem—as an effort to do away with literature."⁸

Blanchot's move was to read the very absence of Mallarmé's *Livre*, not as a failure, but as its greatest promise. Participating in the *Comité d'action étudiants-écrivains* in May 1968, he wrote, "Everything in the history of our culture and in history itself that has constantly destined writing not for the book, but for the absence of the book, has constantly anticipated, and at the same time prepared for, this upheaval"⁹:

In May there is no book about May... This stop [*arrêt*] put to the book, which is also a stop put to history, and which, far from taking us back to a point preceding culture indicates a point lying way beyond culture, is what is most provocative to

⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 225

⁸ Leo Bersani, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 45.

⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *Political Writings, 1933-1993*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 204

authority, to power, to the law... No more books, never again, for as long as we remain in contact with the upheaval of the break.¹⁰

Mallarmé no doubt regretted his inability to write the Book that would end the book, to construct a work within his culture that would be “beyond culture,” and he could not, as Blanchot or the Situationists would in the 1960s, identify the supersession and realization of art with the emergence of spontaneous forms of revolutionary action (in the Commune, for example). If he nevertheless continued to write from within that “interregnum for Art,” from within the condition of failure, it was to produce a momentary suspension of the present and its forms of communication and experience. Unlike any thinker of his century, Mallarmé followed the consequences of the modern dream of the aesthetic transformation of the world—the equivalent for art of Marx’s last thesis on Feuerbach, “the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to change it”¹¹—but, deferred the total dissolution of art into a future that might never arrive. For the time being, he “withdrew” and produced only “minor and disseminated” poems, which remained faithful to their utopian horizon precisely by interrupting the “false appearance of the present” (D 140).

“We’re going through a tunnel—*our era*,” Mallarmé proposed, and the traveler on the train through capitalist modernity awaits the exit all the while contemplating “suicide or abstention” (D 218). Mallarmé warned that the station ahead was under construction and that “The underground will last as long, O impatient one, as your concentration in preparing a glass building polished by the flight of Justice” (D 218; OCII 217). The train has continued its triumphant path deeper into the tunnel, following an unforeseeable route and requiring constant

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Marx, Karl. “The Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: WW Norton & Co. Inc., 1978, p. 145.

upkeep to avoid engine failure, and in the century after Mallarmé's death the utopian poles of aesthetic modernism sought to either describe the light on the other side or to pull the emergency break, with neither approach, we are periodically reminded, encountering much success.

This dissertation has proposed that the artists and works under consideration—a certain conjuncture within European modernism and its avant-gardes—did not constitute a moment of heroic presence now lost, to which we will never cease to bid farewell, nor even less a naive dream from which we have since awakened, sobered by the light of day. Rather, Mallarmé's lesson was to make “failure” over into a principle of productivity through which to create *in spite* of the present. From the blankness of Cadaqués to Duchamp's null result, from the cubist matrices of industrial language and color to the Dadaist mimesis of social fragmentation, this dissertation has traced works that acted within reified modes of social communication in order to produce a momentary lapse or delay. It is no tragedy that these artists could not hold the gap open long or wide enough for a whole era and people to pass through, as they had sometimes wished. For, in the register of the hypothesis and only for the blink of an eye, their failures modeled the destruction of our language and the possibility of building a new one from its ruins.

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