



AS AN EXERCISE not in art criticism but in New Criticism, Dalia Judovitz's *Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010) treats works of art as if they are self-contained. She tends to focus on visual and linguistic puns, as well as his passing remarks. When Judovitz considers Duchamp's many entrepreneurial schemes, she doesn't take into account that he never took up any of his proposed plans, such as paint manufacturer, art handler, or dealer in Picassos (whom he was known to ridicule). But in point of fact Duchamp proclaimed that he'd "had it up to here with being a painter or cinematographer" (1922 letter to Henri-Pierre Roché). Judovitz intervenes in the static of Duchamp's ambivalence, however, when she considers as fundamental a statement like, "You know very well that I have nothing to exhibit—that the word exhibit [*exposer*] resembles the word marriage [*épouser*] for me" (1921 letter to Crotti). In other words, marriage and exhibitions entail commitment. Being subject to another's gaze, one is no longer so "free" as when one tinkers in the studio, a point Judovitz overlooks, in

favor of stressing Duchamp's privileging of the conceptual over the retinal.

Judovitz next suggests a connection between the *Large Glass*'s longer title, which references a bride and her bachelors, and Duchamp's aversion to exhibiting art, a notion that proves contradictory since he placed his "delay in glass" to face Maria Martins's 1940 bronze sculpture *Yara*, then standing in the courtyard of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He evidently assumed the works would remain frozen in time, separated only by a window. Judovitz then claims that the notorious "Nuts to you" telegram Duchamp sent Crotti was exhibited in Tzara's 1921 "Salon Dada," a point she fails to footnote (other than to source the translation). If Judovitz is producing new scholarship, she should explain how her views deviate from others' views, as well as cite her sources.

Judovitz mentions that the Francis Picabia/René Clair film *En'tracte* (1924) features Duchamp's acting debut, during which he plays chess with Man Ray (60). However, in a 1918 letter, he told Crotti to check out Léonce Perret's film *Lafayette, We Come!* released the same year, in which Duchamp plays a wounded man. She then claims that *En'tracte* marks his passage from being an artist to being an actor and later filmmaker, even though he'd told Crotti and his sister four years earlier that he already owned a "motion picture camera" and mentions a short film and his plans to work as an assistant cameraman in a 1921 letter to the Arensbergs. Rather than "strip cinema bare of its retinal presuppositions," as Judovitz argues, the mid-1920 films of Picabia, Clair, Ray, and Duchamp sought to deprive cinema of its narrative aims, transforming the technology into an "illusion-producing apparatus" (66), which in the process obliged spectators to make sense of worked-over footage and cinematic tropes, such as reversing footage. Judovitz also stages Picabia as Dada's defender in 1924, even though three years earlier his journal 391 had been first to denounce the movement. It is important to understand that Picabia actively hastened and delayed Dada's demise, not unlike the way his ballet *Relâche* (French for "No Show Today") confused "the announcement of the ballet's performance with its cancellation" (63).

# DUCHAMP DELAYED

Another point of contention is that Duchamp never used the term "appropriation" in relation to his practice (the poet/Surrealist-organizer André Breton coined the phrase "sovereignty of choice" instead). According to Thierry de Duve, Pierre Restany first introduced the term in connection with Nouveau Réalisme during the 1960s. Regarding his rectified readymades (*Pharmacy* [1914], *Apolinère Enameled* [1916-17], *L.H.O.O.Q.* [1919] or *Wanted, \$2,000 Reward* [1923]), Duchamp "doctored" existing objects, more to make them his own than to borrow from others. According to the online Duchamp studies journal *Tout-Fait*, the "readymade" enterprise is entirely fictitious, since no one has ever discovered the "found" originals. As Judovitz herself rightly points out, Duchamp revalued these commodities, pushing them off their pedestals. However, his producing replicas whenever his versions disappeared most certainly emphasized them, even if his supposed indifference once debased their significance. Were Duchamp really predominantly conceptual and anti-retinal, would he have stopped to pepper the world with replicas and mini-copies? Trouble is, Duchamp's works are experiential, and you can't have experiences without things meant to provoke particular thoughts, however delayed.

Perceptual geniuses like Duchamp (and many of his peers) grasped optical illusions such as "seeing 3-D on 2-D surfaces" a half-century before the Concrete and Op art movements. Sight conveys our experiential world, which touches upon perceptual coordinates, so Duchamp's practice was hardly so anti-ocular as Judovitz craves. As he once said in a 1969 interview with Cleve Gray for *Art in America*, "Painting should not be *exclusively* [my emphasis] visual or retinal. It must interest the gray matter; our appetite for intellectualization." The readymades, which he likened to snapshots, are noticeable, but eschew contemplation. Duchamp effectively substituted the fully sensorial for the merely retinal.

Duchamp's oeuvre is predicated on the fact that witnesses transform private acts (romance, sex, art) into public events (marriage, children, exhibitions), however delayed or leading to near misses. So long as spectators complete artworks, they are ocular witnesses, just as Duchamp's own 1922 calling card, naming as yet another "near" business venture, stated "Precision Oculism/Rose Sélavy/ New York-Paris/ Complete Line of Whiskers and Kicks." Perhaps I am too influenced by de Duve, but I prefer his distinction between the delay (*retard*) and the gaze (*regard*), thus enabling viewers to complete the picture at their own speed, delaying its significance, which gazing never clarifies anyway.

One of the virtues of Judovitz's book is her command of French. She unravels several Duchamp puns that to my knowledge had yet to be disentangled. For example, she remarks that a 1915 diagram titled *Encadrement* can be broken down into "en cadre ment," loosely translated as "a frame lies." She repeatedly reminds us that the "ocul" part of ocular parallels the pronunciation of *au cul*, which means "in the butt" (16). However, her subjection of Duchamp's work to such intense literary scrutiny, as if it contained hidden messages requiring decoding, seems at odds with his being the purveyor of pictorial nominalism, his intended strategy for presenting imagery devoid of expression.

Duchamp scholars are either very strict, trying not to let their imaginations run wild with every possible association, or enjoy poetic license so much that they soon overstep the mark. His work implores viewers to interpret more and more, far beyond what he could ever have conceived and farther than what typically makes sense. The safest bet is to play by his rules, which are strangely limited to the "imagination." I say imagination, since his works forbid interaction, yet readily provoke "thoughts of" sensations such as taste or smell (*Belle Haleine*, 1921), touch (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913) and, directly or indirectly, sounds (*À Bruit secret*, 1916).

~Sue Spaid