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AN ASPECT OF PERCEPTION:- TRANSPOSITION

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BY

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## P R E F A C E

It is through our ability to perceive that we can attempt to come to terms with reality. The aspect of perception which I am writing about is that of transposition, where through a process of isolation an object is situated outside its own field of power and removed to a paradoxically energetic field, and thereby is freed of its expected role or function. Transposition can therefore be a way of shaking us out of induced visual complacency.

In this thesis I have attempted to outline how we perceive things visually in general, before talking about transposition in particular.

In relation to the notion of transposition I have attempted to answer the question of how it occurs and also to put forward some of the reasons why it occurs, with particular reference to the area of art activity.

And finally, to look briefly at some of the general reasons why our knowledge of perception and transposition has increased since the turn of the century.

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1.

In order to assimilate a multi-directional vision, we consciously and unconsciously scan. As our minds are incapable of comprehending every stimuli we selectively attend to certain aspects of our environment. What we attend to is effected both by the characteristics of the stimuli such as intensity and contrast, and internal factors such as motivation. Our interest may indeed, be born suddenly, in that we may have passed over the object many times before without noticing it. Scanning in this way we tend therefore to dismiss or register only as signs that with which we are not immediately concerned with.

While the number of unrelated elements we can perceive at an instance is limited, we broaden our perception by organizing separate elements into unified wholes. We do this through the processes of categorization and ordering.

It can be noted that in categorizing stimuli we are not only dealing with entities, but relationships whereby they can enter into a larger whole. Our universe appears to be constructed on a hierarchical principle, small things are parts of larger things which again are parts of still larger things.

This need for classification has always played a major role in our lives and has helped us to adjust to our environment, by providing a certain amount of predictability.

We have an established repertory of reactions to any given category of objects. So once classification of an object has occurred, we can then employ our existing repertory of reactions. This saves us from deciding again, starting from first principles what our reaction should be to any particular object.

Our reactions are therefore decided upon through experience, experiences which are stored in our brains according to previously formed categories, which may be perceptual, motivational, actional or conceptional. So it can be seen that perceptual learning takes place in such a way as to bind bits of information into a system, and by making use of such systems we are able to perceive complex patterns which would otherwise be quite beyond our capacity.

The most basic organization in perception is the separation of the perceptual field into two parts, - one, dominant and unified, which is the focus of our attention, the other more homogeneous and diffuse. The basis of our ability to do this is through memory, for classical and instrumental conditioning, stimulus generalization and transfer of learning all involve memory. For without this ability the world would be perpetually new for us.<sup>1</sup>

However, although categorization has considerable survival value as it simplifies our task of responding to the environment it does involve a great loss of information. Also, the effect of placing a stimulus in any given category can be that it is then assumed to have the same associations with other categories that the typical members of the category have with these other categories.

Language has a key function in this categorization. It consists essentially of a concept level coding system, providing us therefore with an excellent system of coding above the perceptual level. When a language provides a term for a particular category, it facilitates the use of this category by those who speak it.

Just as in language the 'word' could be said to form the basic unit, the simplest of our perceptual units is what we call the 'object',

A German group of Psychologists known as the 'Gestalt School' have suggested several ways by which objects tend to be categorized, for instance;

- (i) Similar objects tend to be grouped together.
- (ii) Through proximity - when stimuli are close together they tend to be grouped together.
- (iii) Common movement favours grouping, stimuli which change together in the same direction tend to be organized together.
- (iv) Through contrast, stimuli which are different from their surroundings are organized together and are seen as a configuration.
- (v) Inclusiveness through camouflage, which often attempts to keep something from being perceived by destroying its configuration through incorporating in it a more inclusive figure.
- (vi) Meaning effort, by which is meant that the outstanding feature of all perception is the effort to attain meaning, and that to perceive without finding meaning would not really be to perceive at all. 'Meaning' here being towards a solution in the problem of coding the universe, through a representational system which will enable us to carry out appropriate actions to satisfy our needs.<sup>2</sup>

However, it should be taken into account that we have the ability to produce new combinations of our coding experience.

We do this through unconscious scanning, where we make use of undifferentiated modes of vision, that to normal awareness would seem chaotic.

This unconscious or primary process is usually referred to as imagination, because it largely involves dealing with images, and it lends itself much more to the area of creativity, before the ordering and categorization of stimuli takes place. Baudelaire's concept of imagination can be said to relate to this process in that he saw imagination as being "an almost divine faculty which perceives at once quite without resort to philosophical methods, the intimate and secret connections between things, correspondence and analogies".<sup>3</sup>

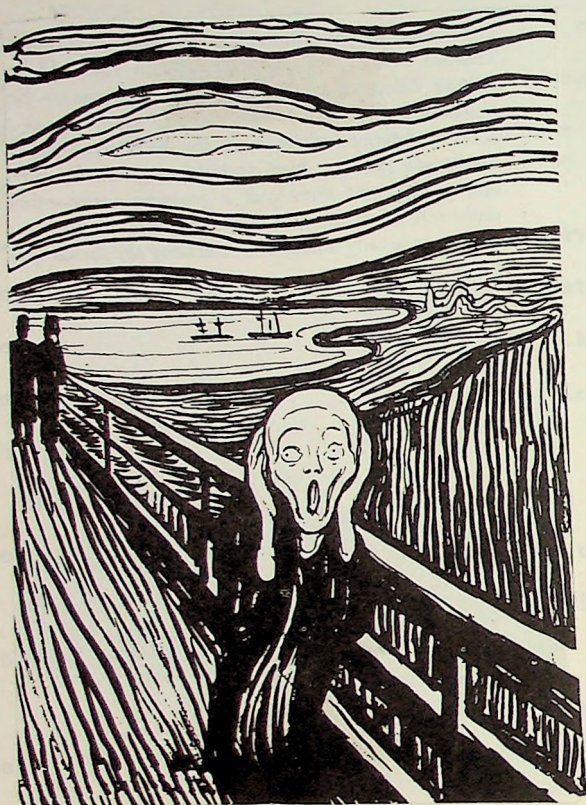
Perhaps our growing awareness of the plural significance of experience can in a way be linked to Einstein's theory of relativity in physics, which abolished the absolute space and time of Newtonian theory. Relativity represented the demise of any view of the universe as static and predictable, it represented the shift from a timeless Euclidean world in which all is precise, determined and invariable, to a dynamic universe where everything is relative and changing in the process.

The object is obviously subject also to notions of relativity and perceptual change. As De Chirico wrote:- "Every object has two appearances, one, the current one, which we nearly always see and which is seen by people in general, the other a spectral or metaphysical appearance beheld only by some rare individuals in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction, as in the case of certain bodies concealed by substances impenetrable by sunlight, yet discernible, for instance, by X-Ray or other powerful artificial means".<sup>4</sup>

In relation to the first appearance mentioned, objects are not necessarily limited to the initial or current appearance. On a purely physical level, as you walk around an object, for instance a chair, the projection from the chair to your retina varies from a rectangle to a trapezoid. Yet you do not perceive it as an elastic chair changing its shape as you change your angle of vision. Also the appearance of an object can change subtly according to light or through its relationships with other objects around it.

These aspects of vision were initially best understood by Cezanne and later by the Cubists. As Merdeau-Ponty writes: he (Cezanne) 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. He makes a basic distinction not between 'the senses' and 'the understanding', but rather between the spontaneous organization of the things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. We see things, we agree about them, we are anchored in them, and it is with 'nature' as our base that we construct our sciences. Cezanne wanted to paint this primordial world..., he wished, as he said, to confront the sciences with the nature from which they came",<sup>5</sup>

However, while recognising that objects can be seen in the light of their subjectively poetic and metaphysical implications, which are generally obscured by their everyday contexts and uses, the spectral appearance referred to by De Chirico can be brought out, not only through clairvoyance, but also through emotions, such as terror, desire or pleasure.



①  
The Cry By Edward Munch.

As is expressed in The Cry by Edward Munch, in which the entire landscape seems to reverberate with the agony of the girl's cry. Demonstrating perhaps how emotion can illuminate the object to such an extent that its image fills the frame of our minds eye, and without us having to confront the object of our terror, through our imagination it takes on an appearance not necessarily related to its physical one.

However, 'an object', Magritte asserted, "never serves the same function as its image, or its name, the painted image of a hat releases signals of far different meaning than the hat itself or the word 'hat'. There is little relation between an object and that which it represents".<sup>6</sup>

And yet in trying to grasp understanding and meaning by re-arranging the infinite continuation of non-identical events and objects into a finite system of similarities we find that it need not, cannot be always so finite.

In 1913 a poet and critic, Benjamin De Casseses wrote:-  
"sanity and simplicity are the prime curses of civilization... a kind of lunacy wherein a fixed idea blankets the brain and smooths the admirable incoherence of life to a smug symmetry and proportion".<sup>7</sup>

Familiarity can become blinding. We become so accustomed to seeing things in a certain way that we stop seeing them or register them only as signs. Our eyes take everything for granted. But change your way of seeing, - even ever so slightly - and it is as if you are seeing for the first time,

2.

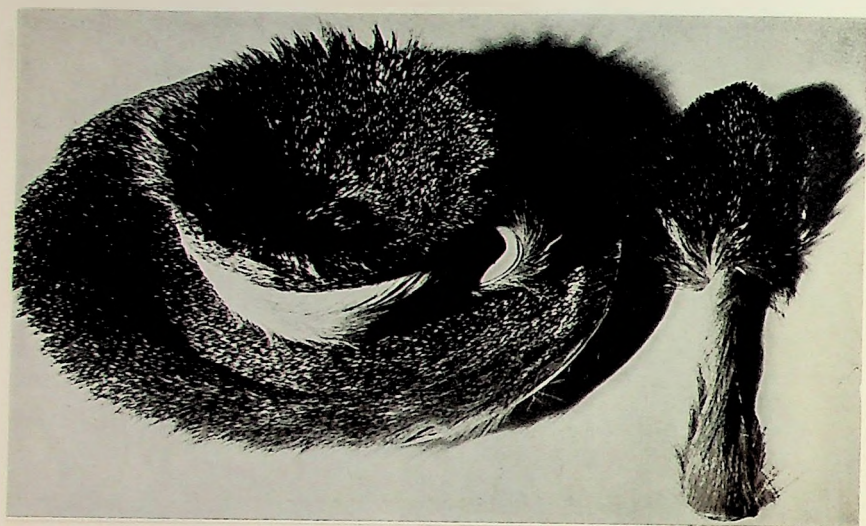
The means by which just such a decisive moment of reassessment and revaluing of the object are achieved are many.

However, the aspect which I am most concerned with is that of transposition, where through a process of isolation an object is situated outside its own field of power and removed to a paradoxically energetic field, and thereby is freed of its expected role or function.

This notion of transposition can exist also in collaboration with various other ways of reassessment, for instance, where some aspect of the object is altered, in that a property with which it normally has no association is injected into it, as in Oppenheimers Fur Cup, or by the withdrawal from the object of a property with which it is normally associated, for instance in Max Ernst's photomontage Here everything is still floating, where the property of gravity is taken away from the objects.


The visual pun can also be brought into play in the form of a double image, or by the use of intellectual antithesis through paradox. An example of the former can be seen in Salvador Dalis' picture Paranoiac Face, and the latter in the delicately balanced contradictions of the glass and the umbrella in Magritte's Hegals Holiday.

Another way by which a crisis of the object can be brought about is by the creation of an incongruity, by change in (i) scale, as in Magritte's Personal Values, where small everyday objects are enlarged to such an extent that they dominate the room in which they are situated. (ii) by position, an example of this can be seen in one of Max Ernst's collages Two Young Ladies Promenading



(ii)  
Fur Cup By Oppenheimer. ~~Modeling~~ By Max Ernst.



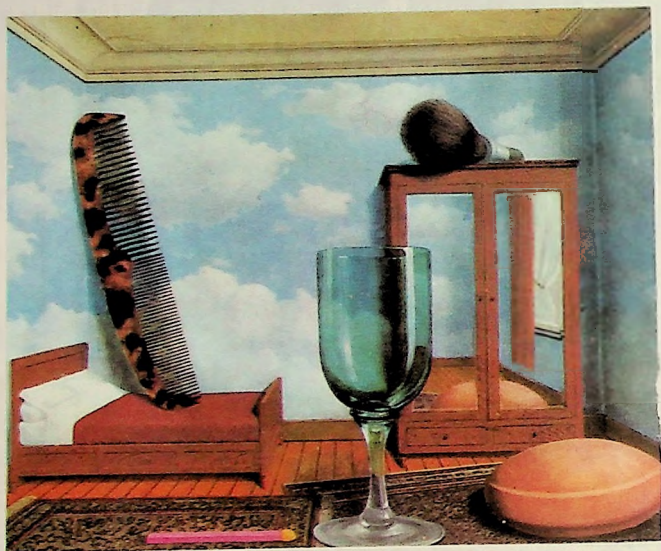
 Here Everything is Still Floating By Max Ernst.



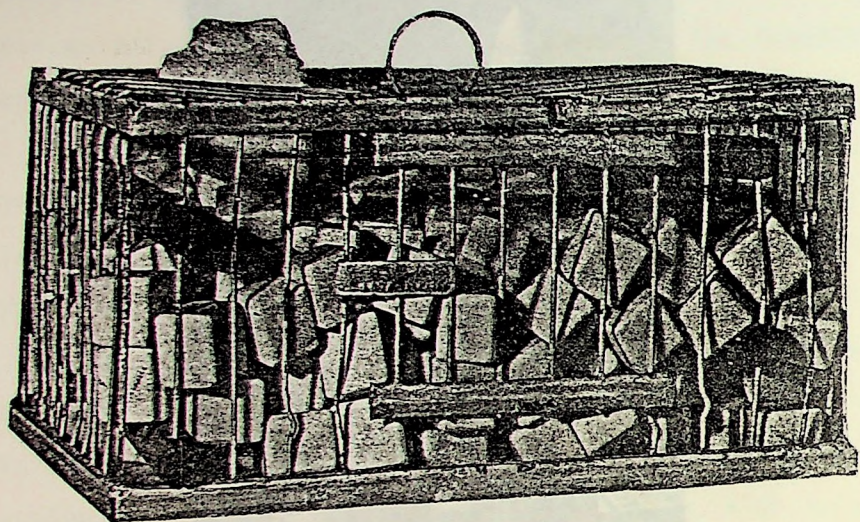
(iv)  
Paranoiac Face. By Salivador Dali.



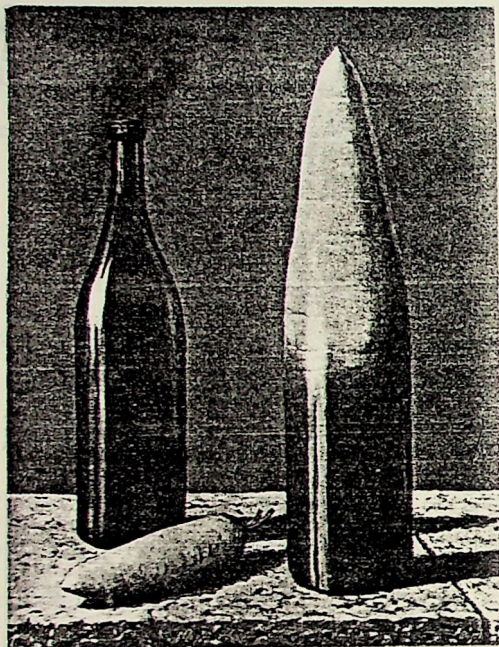
(v)  
Hegals Holiday. By Magritte.



(V)  
Personal Values. By Magritte.



(vii)  
Why Not Sneeze Rose Selany. By Duchamp



(ix) "The Explanation" By Magritte.

through the sky, or (iii) by change in substance as in Marcel Duchamp's Why not sneeze Rose Selany? in which what appears to be sugar lumps <sup>are</sup> in fact white marble.

Finally, a crisis of the object can be brought about, by the combination of two familiar objects to produce a third bewildering one through hybridization, an example here being The Explanation by Magritte, which involves the combination of a bottle and a carrot.

With regard however to the notion of transposition it should be noted that by an objects detachment from one actual situation and orientation to another it need not always be the case that it is transposed intact, implying that the meaning of a shape is not always to be found in its abstractness or separability.

Merdeau-Ponty in The Phenomenology of Perception writes about this notion of abstractable aspects of the senses, when he talks about colour, "this red patch which I see on the carpet is red only in virtue of a shadow which lies across it, its quality is apparent only in relation to the play of light upon it, and hence as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover, the colour can be said to be there only if it occupies an area of a certain size. Too small an area not being describable in these terms. Finally, this red would literally not be the same if it were not the 'woolly red' of the carpet".

It is only on a colour chart that the red of the rug and the red of the wall could be thought to be the same red, and then on the colour chart, the very concept of redness signifies something else.<sup>8</sup>

It is perhaps the phrase 'signifies something else' which is the key to the concept of transposition.

In his work 'hopscotch', which consists of a checkered rug with a chair and table setting, Brecht makes no attempt to change the meaning of his objects, he is said to have described them as just simple things to see how life goes and how it should go. However, although Brecht chose not to go beyond the quiddity of his objects, one cannot be unaware of the oscillation between the ordinary object and the art object which occurs. As is the case also with the work of an English artist Daniel Bainbridge, who in response to a commission from Camden Borough Council, built a crane. He used the commission as a pretext to investigate the changes of status possible with one object. A concern which had interested many artists especially the Pop artists, since Duchamp first introduced the concept with his first ready make bicycle wheel in 1913.

Bainbridge's crane was sometimes a member of the class 'art object', and sometimes a functional crane depending on the location and attributed function.

Another artist who has been interested in this notion of transposition is Michel Craig Martin. In 1977 in the Oliver Dowling gallery Craig Martin laid claim to the fact that a glass of water which he had transposed into a glass shelf was in actual fact an oak tree.

Q: To begin with, could you describe this work?

A: Yes, of course, what I've done is change a glass of water into a full-grown oak tree without altering the accidents of the

glass of water.

Q: The accidents?

A: Yes. The colour, feel, weight, size ....

Q: Do you mean that the glass of water is a symbol of an oak tree?

A: No. It's not a symbol. I've changed the physical substance of the glass of water into that of an oak tree.

Q: It looks like a glass of water ....

A: Of course it does. I didn't change its appearance. But it's not a glass of water. It's an oak tree.

Q: Can you prove what you claim to have done?

A: Well, yes and no. I claim to have maintained the physical form of the glass of water and, as you can see, I have. However, as one normally looks for evidence of physical change in terms of altered form, no such proof exists.

Q: Haven't you simply called this glass of water an oak tree?

A: Absolutely not. It is not a glass of water any more. I have changed its actual substance. It would no longer be accurate to call it a glass of water. One could call it anything one wished but that would not alter the fact that it is an oak tree.

Q: Isn't this just a case of the emperor's new clothes?

A: No. With the emperor's new clothes people claimed to see something which wasn't there because they felt they should. I would be very surprised if anyone told me they saw an oak tree.

Q: Was it difficult to effect the change?

A: No effort at all. But it took me years of work before I

realized I could do it.

Q: When precisely did the glass of water become an oak tree?

A: When I put water in the glass.

Q: Does this happen every time you fill a glass with water?

A: No, of course not. Only when I intend to change it into an oak tree.

Q: Then intention causes the change?

A: I would say it precipitates the change.

Q: You don't know how you do it?

A: It contradicts what I feel I know about cause and effect.

Q: It seems to me you're claiming to have worked a miracle.

Isn't that the case?

A: I'm flattered that you think so.

Q: But aren't you the only person who can do something like this?

A: How could I know?

Q: Could you teach others to do it?

A: No. It's not something one can teach.

Q: Do you consider that changing the glass of water into an oak tree constitutes an art-work?

A: Yes.

Q: What precisely is the art-work? The glass of water?

A: There is no glass of water any more.

Q: The process of change?

A: There is no process involved in the change.

Q: The oak tree?

A: Yes. The oak tree.

Q: But the oak tree only exists in the mind.

A: No. The actual oak tree is physically present but in the form

of the glass of water. As the glass of water was a particular glass of water, the oak tree is also particular. To conceive the category 'oak tree' or to picture a particular oak tree is not to understand and experience what appears to be a glass of water as an oak tree. Just as it is imperceivable, it is also inconceivable.

Q: Did the particular oak tree exist somewhere else before it took the form of the glass of water?

Q: No. This particular oak tree did not exist previously. I should also point out that it does not and will not ever have any other form but that of a glass of water.

Q; How long will it continue to be an oak tree?

A; Until I change it.<sup>9</sup>

The questions arising out of this piece are not totally dissimilar to Bainbridge's crane, as both are concerned with the art object. But, whereas the transposition of the crane can be approached in a tangible way, the oak tree/glass of water is more a 'mind' change, to be approached perhaps on a more metaphysical level. The piece seems to investigate not just the ordinary object versus the art object but the actual identity of the ordinary object in the first place.

Reasons why artists have felt it necessary to employ the concept of transposition are manifold. However, the following three reasons are perhaps the major ones.

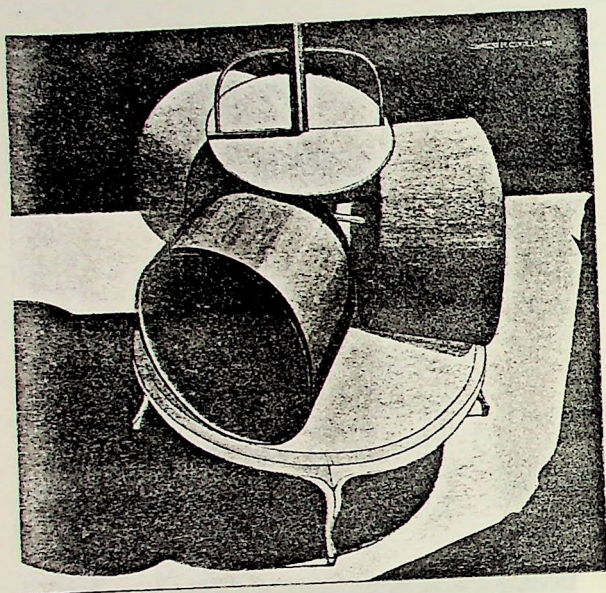
(i) Transposition has often been used as a method by which to pose questions. Questions such as the ones which Duchamp formulated were to do with what makes a work of art - "Can one make works which are not works of art? What is the expectation of meaning which we carry to works of art? Why do we think of

them as statements that must convey or embody a certain content. Further, if that content is generated by ourselves, - by our own need to find a meaning - are we justified at all in believing that content to be casually connected to the producer of the object?

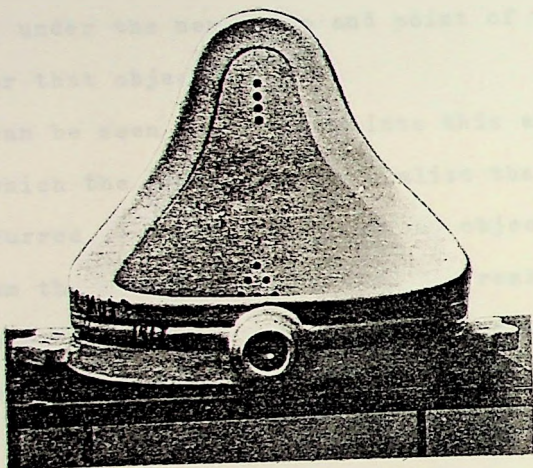
Dissatisfied with the images he had been painting such as Chocolate Grinder, as they were still too involved with the aesthetic convention that inevitably informs any three dimensional illusion on a flat, regular field, Duchamp realized that the solution lay in taking the logical step from the tromp l'oeil replica of an object to the object itself, and so, the ready made can be defined as any common, elaborated entity that solely by reason of having been chosen by the author without undergoing any modification is consecrated a work of art.

Duchamp allowed for the individual work of art to be no longer an imitation of the merely actual, but a new reality in itself, where it could be both an object within the physical world of other objects and a fact in consciousness - a 'brain fact'.

Fountain was a urinal that Duchamp had rotated 90° so the side that would normally be connected to the wall was now the underside, or base of the sculpture. In its new position, the work was then signed pseudonymously and dated - R Mutt 1917, and submitted to the independent show in New York. The reasons why it was suppressed - not shown, were presumably twofold. The major one was probably that the sculpture was nothing but an ordinary object and the second reason was that as a urinal, the object violated the bounds of good taste. But for Duchamp the work was no longer a common object, because it had been transposed.



(X)  
Chocolate Grinder. By Duchamp.



(XI)

Fountain. By Duchamp.

It had been inverted to rest on a pedestal, which is to say, it had been repositioned, and this physical repositioning stood for a transformation that must then be read on a metaphysical level. As he wrote "whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object".<sup>10</sup>

And so it can be seen that folded into this act of inversion is a moment in which the viewer has to realize that an act of transfer has occurred, - an act in which the object has been transplanted from the ordinary world into the realm of art.

As Nolge asserted, "It is not enough to create an object, it is not enough for it to 'be', to be seen we have to show it, that is to say, by some artifice to excite in the spectator the desire, the need to see".<sup>11</sup>

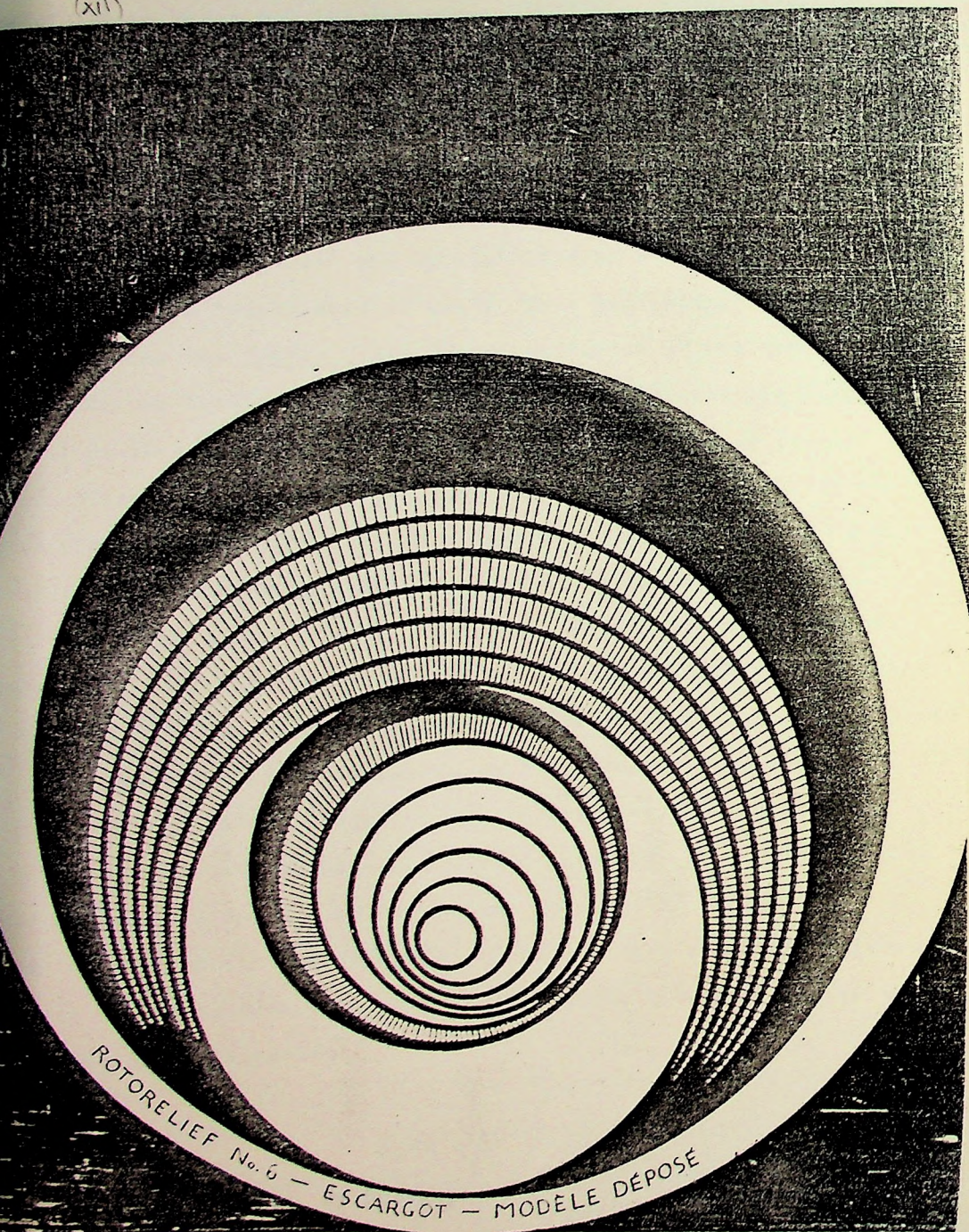
Transposition from an ordinary logical context can be achieved also by renaming the object, the new title having no obvious relationship to the object as ordinarily understood. Duchamp himself was quite taken up at this time with experiments in language, paralleling the readymades. The ambiguous, multilevel meanings of Duchamps verbal 'trouvailles' were also inextricably linked to the readymades and the large glass, not simply as disconcerting titles, In advance of a broken arm, for a snow shovel, or Fresh Widow for a french window, but as sources for the images themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Puns like poetry undermine the basic suppositions of a static and immutable reality since they are concerned with equating two different realities. As Duchamp himself states " If you introduce a familiar word into an alien atmosphere, you have something comparable to distortion in painting, something surprising and new.... since one discovers unexpected meanings attached to the interrelationships of disparate words.... sometimes four or five different levels of meaning come through".<sup>13</sup>

Readymades were intended by Duchamp to be devoid of aesthetic interest, "A point that I (Duchamp) want very much to establish is that the choice of these readymades was never dictated by an aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time, a total absence of good or bad taste, in fact a complete anesthesia."<sup>14</sup>

What seems in retrospect to have been an ineluctable progression away from art reached its final phase around 1920, when Duchamp ceased making images of machines, an example of which is Tu'm, a dictionary of his main ideas prior to 1918. Just as the nineteenth century academicians created 'giant machines' in which to demonstrate their command of the mechanics of representational painting, so Duchamp in what literally appears to be a horizontal machine demonstrates his mastery of what is now his own considerably expanded 'mechanics'. Duchamp now began to construct actual machines. This transition from anti-artist to engineer found him still true, nevertheless, to his ironic view of experience, for his machines devied their own premises by their absolute uselessness. The two most significant of these are Rotary Glass Plate, - painted segments of glass that give illusions of a circle which rotates on

(xii)



a metal axis, and the Roto reliefs - a series of cardboard discs covered with patterns of coloured lines that create three dimensional illusions of objects when spinning at a rate of around thirty-three revolutions a minute.

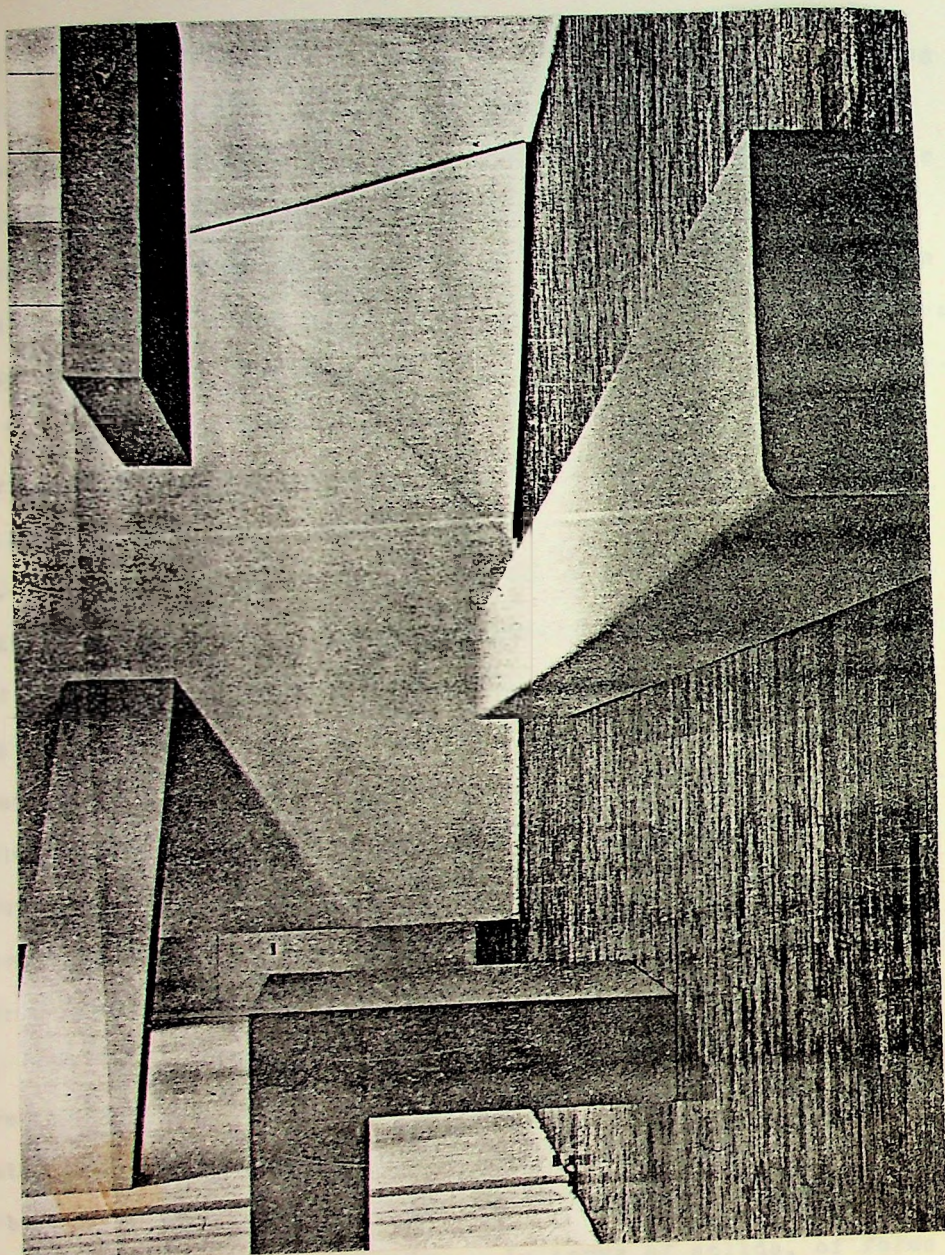
Duchamps machines were involved with optical as well as mechanical questions, but optical questions outside the framework of the plastic arts. This basic anti-aesthetism distinguishes him from some of the younger artists whose aims have been to reintergrate the kinetic and optical effects - even accidental ones - into an 'experience of art'. Thus Rausenbergs Revolvers differs from the Rotary Glass Plate, by virtue of the same aestheticism that separates Jasper Johns cast bronze Ale Cans with their painted surface from a readymade. In destroying itself, Jean Tinguely's Homage to New York fused the machine concept and the idea of Dada action in one single nihilistic event. Tinguely's machines for making pictures appeared to bring the wheel of Duchamp's logic full circle. But these metamatics did not really make art, they only provided a kinetic instrumentality. The extent to which the images they produced were art depended upon the choices - settings controlling distance, colour, contour etc. - made in the construction and operation of the machines. Their, perhaps unintentional revelation - one buried somewhere in the implication of Duchamp's reduction of 'creation' to a matter of selection - was to confirm that painting is almost entirely a matter of decisions following from conception, as distinct from facility in the techniques of execution.<sup>15</sup>

as objective confirmation of some part of the authors self - his unconscious needs, his desires. The Surrealist encounter was conceived of as a kind of proof that objects could be shaped by that aspect of the self. Objects were manifestations then, of the self as it was projected outward. They were the realization of the Tzara prediction about the poem that 'it will resemble you', where 'you' is understood as author. But the viewers reaction to Oldenburg's work transposes these terms to 'I resemble them' where the 'I' is the spectator and 'they' are the banal objects that fill his space.

With regard to the supra-personal and impersonal treatment of persons as an aspect of the happenings, these are clearly important to Oldenburg's sculptural thinking.

In the happenings the people were often shrouded in burlap sacks, or they were rendered inanimate props, or acted upon as though they were depersonalized instruments - lifted thrown or pushed. Another way in which people were employed is in the discovery or the impassioned repetitive use of materials for their sensuous properties rather than their conventional uses. For Example, dropping pieces of bread into a bucket of water, setting a table for a meal or hanging up laundry.

Whereas the Pop artists worked with images that were already highly inflected, such as R. Lichtenstein's paintings of frames from comic books, the Minimalists used elements into which content of a specific kind had not been built. Because of this they were able to deal with the readymade as an abstract unit and to focus attention on the more general questions of the ways by



xiii  
Grey Polyhedrons. By Robert Morris.

which it could be deployed. What they were doing was exploiting the idea of the readymade in a far less anecdotal way than the Pop artists, considering its structural rather than its thematic implications. For example in Andre 's 'Lever', 1966 the fire-bricks remain obdurately external, as objects of use rather than vehicles of expression. In this sense the readymade elements can convey on a purely abstract level the idea of simple externality.

The dependence upon the facts of an objects exterior, in order to determine 'what it is' occurs in the Grey Polyhedrons that Robert Morris made in 1964/65.

" .... art objects have clearly divisible parts which set up the relationships. Such a condition suggests the alternative question - could a work exist which has only one property? Obviously not, since nothing exists which has only one property. A single, pure sensation cannot be transmissible precisely because one perceives simultaneously more than one as parts in any given situation. If colour, then also dimension, if flatness, then texture, etc, However, certain forms do exist which, if they do not negate the numerous relative sensations of colour to texture, scale to mass, etc, they do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shapes. Such are the simplex forms which create strong Gestalt sensations. Their parts are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation. In terms of solids, of forms applicable to sculpture these Gestalts are the simpler polyhedrons.<sup>16</sup>

A sculpture which bridges the gap between the Minimalist side and the NeoDada side of Morris' early work is the set of four mirrored cubes . The cubes are somewhat NeoDada in the games

they play with visual ambiguities and notions about levels of reality through having reflecting surfaces where blank ones would have been expected. The units and their arrangement are stable, they are laid out as if at the four corners of a square, yet what is seen in them is unstable, circumstantial and unpredictable - whatever happens to be around, - whoever happens to be passing.

In his felt pieces Morris contrives to render invalid the notion of judging the quality of a sculpture on the basis of form - producing in effect an object and an indefinite set of possibilities. The objecthood of the felt pieces is emphasized by the participation of gravity in the generation of the forms they may take. This is also the case with many of Oldenburgs sculptures but unlike Oldenburgs and also unlike Beuy's felt piano, they are not hollow. No other form is replicated and therefore there is no route away from the object physically present.

Just as in his earlier hand pieces, such as The Untitled Permutations or Grey Polyhedrons, the exercise of taste in the choice and arrangement of forms was nullified by a kind of banality, with the felt pieces. it is usually nullified both by the impermenence and the degree of complexity and non-selectivity. To this extent the felts (and the hard pieces) may be seen as part of the same interprise as that persued by Pollock and Stella, as well as Duchamp and Judd.

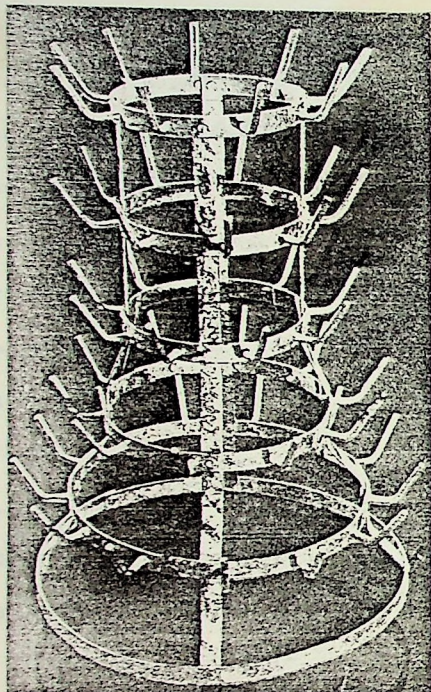
(iii) Transposition was also one of the methods used by the Surrealists in their attempts to free the unconscious, and to allow the subconscious to shape reality. These concerns were not



xiv  
Song of Love. By De Chirico.



(xv)  
Bicycle Wheel. By Duchamp.



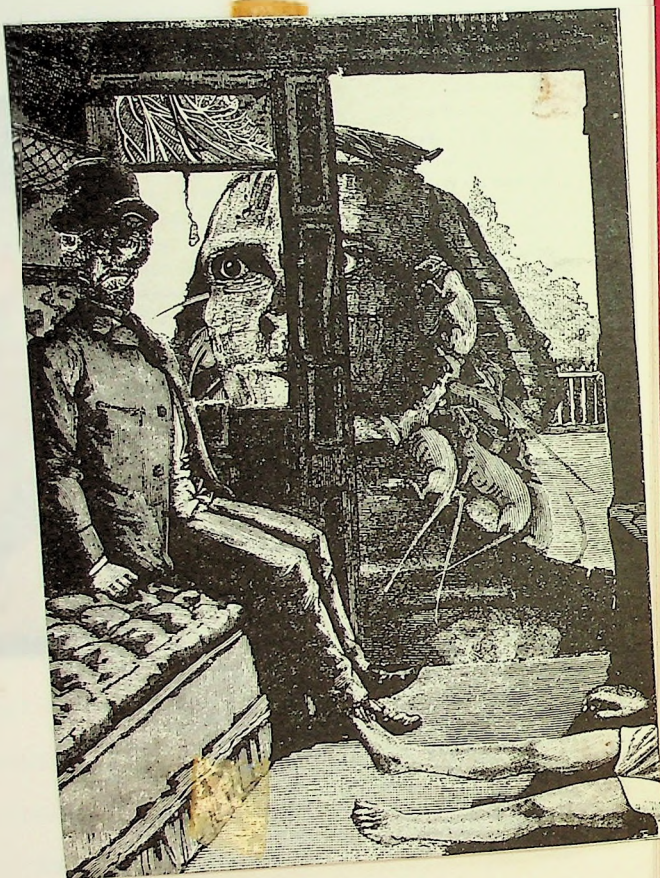
(xvi)  
Bottle Rack. By Duchamp.

unlike those of the Symbolist poets, who had subjected words to a kind of depaysement or transposition in an attempt to liberate their hidden meanings.

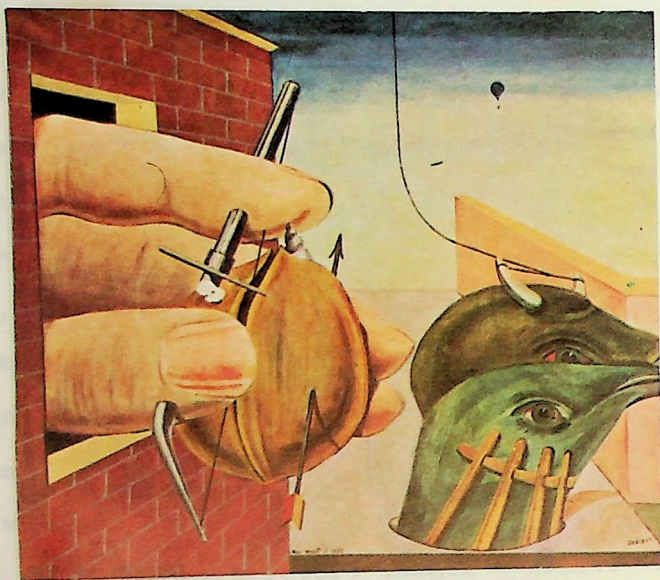
The juxtaposition in De Chirico's Song of Love of the head from an ancient greek sculpture, with a surgeons glove, a ball and a distant locomotive, all set amid arcaded buildings has the telling simplicity, force and directness of Lautreamonts classic evocation. As with the poets sewing machine, umberella and dissection table, each of De Chirico's objects call forth associations that are rationally quite unrelated to the associations of the other objects.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas Duchamp had seen the act of choice, with regard to the readymades, not as a projection of his own taste, but rather as a registration of the beauty of indifference, the Surrealists approach was quite different, Breton spoke of 'objective' chance. The notion of 'objective' chance proceeds from the energies of the unconscious operating at cross purposes with reality. It predicts that the libido working from within the subconsciousness will shape reality according to its own needs, by finding in reality the object of its desire. The original - as opposed to the later 'assisted' readymades of Duchamp anticipated the Surrealist object only insofar as they were tactile, three dimensional things that had been transposed from their ordinary context because they did not involve collaging more than one object, or parts of objects they fell short of the process suggested by Lautreamont.

Also, such readymades as 'Bicycle Wheel' or Bottle Rack, were not intended, as were the Surrealist objects to embody dreams or fantasies, they were sparse in nature, intellectual in character and ironic in spirit.



(XVI)  
From Une Semaine de Bonte. By Max Ernst.



xviii  
Oepidus Rex. By Max Ernst.

Ernst's collages create a scene in which the spectator, deprived of a frame of reference, is disorientated, as can be seen in the collages from Une semaine de bonte or the painting Oedipus Rex. This disorientation is a step towards the destruction of the spectators conventional ways of apprehending the world and dealing with his own experiences according to preconceived patterns.

An insight into Ernst's own attitude in the making of a collage can be seen in one of his letters, "I was struck", he wrote, "by the obsessional interest which I was taking in spite of myself in the pages of an illustrated catalogue which lay to hand". The plates were educational in intent and had to do anthropology, psychology, minerology, palaeontology and the use of the microscope. The figurative elements thus brought together were so remote from one another in their everyday connotations that the catalogue as a whole became palpably absurd. But that very absurdity provided something within him, as he writes, "I experienced a hallucinating succession of self contradictory images - double images, triple images- multiple images - laid one on top of another with the imperious rapidity which characterizes our memories of a love affair or the visions which come to us when we are half asleep and half awake. Their encounters had to take place in a new unknown and on a place from which the idea of 'fitness' or 'prosperity' was excluded. All that I had to do was to take a plate from the catalogue, and add to it, I painted or drew, in docile fashion, whatever presented itself to me, adding a patch of colour, pencilling in a detail or two, a landscape which nothing to do with the objects already represented, a desert, a new sky, a geological cross section,

a floor, a simple straight line to represent the horizon. I secured for myself an exact and premanent image of my hallucination. and what had been simply the most banal pages of advertisement became so many dramas revelatory of my most secret desires".<sup>18</sup>

The Surrealist works were created by the transposition of two separate entities. The object is shrouded in the temporality of fantasy. It can be the recipient of the extended experience of the viewer who projects his own associations onto its surface. The metaphoric connections supported by the object solicit the viewers unconscious projection and invite him to call to consciousness an internal fantastic narrative he has not previously known.

An awareness of the different way by which we perceive, including that of transposition have become much more prevalent in our everyday lives.

The changes and developments which began at the turn of this century and which opened up for us this new awareness are many. For example, in the area of psychology a greater knowledge of the subconscious - of mans' irrational mechanisms was achieved. With the founding of modern physics whole new concepts of our world and of reality were brought about. As Nadeau writes:-  
"We have made a mistake, he (Einstein) says in substance, the real world isn't what we thought, the best founded conceptions apply only to our daily round, out there they're false, false our old conceptions of space, false the time we fabricated, light is propagated in a straight line, and the mass of bodies is a kind of rubber band. The Epistemologists fall into step, questioning the

conditions and limits of knowledge. It seems that knowledge is something else besides action, for which science furnishes recipes that apply to it. The two can no longer be identified, here are the mathematicians with a geometry which dispenses with Euclid and his famous postulate reason, all powerful reason stands accused and stands mute. She has nothing to say in her defense, reality is something besides what we see, hear, touch, taste. There exist unknown forces that control us, but upon which we may hope to act. We have only to find out where they are",<sup>19</sup>

Not only were the changes which occurred to do with new more complex scientific vocabulary but also with whole new processes which paved the way for a secularization of the world which had been unheard of before.

With the introduction of the car and aeroplane there was more efficient and faster travel available, quicker communication also due to the beginnings of mass production and the publishing of mass circulation newspapers.

In relation to various concepts of visual perception whole new areas were being opened up. As, for example, in the increased use and knowledge of photography and in particular the invention of the cinema.

The notion of transposition is a particularly interesting feature of cinema. A medium which has an inherent capacity to subvert visual preconditioning in an attempt to confront its audience with a reality it may have become accustomed to overlook - this can be achieved through the ability to produce surprising shifts in angles, unexpected perspectives or unlikely juxtapositions of images or sounds.

However through the universal popularity of the cinema, this aspect has tended to diminish over the years. The actual process of seeing at twenty four frames a second has become a cliché, and we tend no longer to see films but merely to absorb them. Technical gimmicks become a way of shaking us out of induced visual complacency, for example, flash images, holding a shot longer than the story requires or slow motion - however, these by their very nature lose impact the more they are used.

One of the main lessons we can be said to have learnt through our increased knowledge of the ways by which we perceive things, that although there is a certain amount of predictability, reality for us tends always to be an assumption, although usually a pretty substantiated one, it is nevertheless never something absolute and always something we may have to modify in term of future experience.

## FOOTNOTES

1. McKeachie: Doyle; Moffett: Psychology. Third Edition. Mass. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. 1976. P.324
2. C J Adcock. Fundamentals of Psychology. Revised Edition. Gt. Britain. Pelican Books. 1975. P.142
3. Suzi Gablik. Magritte. London, Thames and Hudson. 1970. P.102
4. William S Rubin. Dada & Surrealist Art. Gt. Britain. London. Thames and Hudson, 1969. P.130
5. Berger, John. Selected Essays and Articles:- The sight of man. Gt. Britain. Pelican. 1971.
6. Harry Torczyner. Magritte Ideas and Images. Trans. by Richard Muttès. New York. Harry N Abrams Inc. P.205
7. William S Rubin. P.60
8. Passages in Modern Sculpture. P.329
9. Catalogue Michel Craig-Martin. 15 April - 7 May 1977. Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.
10. Arthur Schwarz. The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp. New York. Abrams Inc. Publishers. 1970. P.43
11. J H Matthews. The Imagery of Surrealism. Syracuse Uni. Press. 1977. P.224
12. The relation between Fresh Widow and French Window is not a relation of phonology or spelling - through the transposition of the letter 'n' and the change from 's' to 'c'. The only other relationship that these words seem to have is that they are both part of the same language system. The words can be said to be an intermedial piece consisting of physical construction locked between two linguistic ones, so that, when this physical construction is read as an image, as a

representation of its own category, ie. the category of french windows, it oscillates between the two divergent semantic poles fresh widow/french window. It could perhaps be said that what Duchamp does here is to create a series of kinetic art works in which a language field defines the action of something that is put in the middle.

Arthur Schwarz. P.31.

William S Rubin. P.37.

Ibid. P.41.

Micheal Crompton and David Sylvester, Robert Morris. Pub. by order of the Tate Gallery. 1971.

The poet Lautreamont had described the 'chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umberella on a dissection table'.

John Russell. Max Ernst, Life and Work. 1967. London, Thames and Hudson. P.51

Lucy Lippard. Changing Essays in Art Criticism. Essay: Notes on Dada and Surrealism, at the Museum of Modern Art. P.57.

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