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Curatorial 'Translations': The Case of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*

[Facing page, Fig. 1] *The Bride and the Bachelors Duchamp with Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns* (2013), installation view. Photo: © Felix Clay 2013, courtesy of the Barbican Art Gallery.

Abstract

In curatorial studies, translation is a trope that is beginning to define a mode of praxis, through which the mediating role of the curator has developed into a methodology that entails principles of categorization, montage, displacement and assembly. The artist Marcel Duchamp is famous for the popularization of such techniques in the modern and contemporary art context. Furthermore, the theme of translation informs interpretations of his art in differing and unexpected ways, as well as influencing its reception by English speaking audiences. This article negotiates the tension between artist and curator and explores the concept of curatorial translation in three exhibitions of Duchamp's work. *The Green Box* (1934), and its contentious presentation as a verbal

exposition of the seminal piece, *The Large Glass* (1915–23), is the key work through which this concept of translation will be examined.

Keywords

Marcel Duchamp

Green Box

Large Glass

translation

curatorial methodology

In the contemporary art context, there is a well-established precedent for the artist as mediator or translator; through a range of approaches and postproduction techniques artists have challenged the idea of creative purpose and entered into a dynamic relationship with viewers and works of art. The collages of the Surrealists or the experimental performances of the Fluxus group are examples of methods that limit intentionality or emphasize the interpretive role of spectatorship as part of the artistic process. Perhaps the most influential proponent of such methods and one of the originators of the notion of the artist as medium is Marcel Duchamp, for whom the concept of translation constituted a mode of practice.¹ His thoughts pertaining to the artist's mediating role largely originate in 'The Creative Act' (1973 [1957]), written in the last decade of his life. The subject addressed in this text is the relationship between an artist's intentions and the degree to which they are realized, expressed through a

formula called the 'art-coefficient'. Here, the artist is conceived as 'a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing' (Duchamp 1973 [1957]: 138). The poles of art creation encompass the artist on the one hand, and on the other, the spectator, who later becomes posterity. The art-coefficient is the ratio between the 'unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed', which arises during the execution of a work of art (Duchamp 1973 [1957]: 139). This coefficient is no guide to the quality of the artist's work, for all art is good, bad or indifferent; rather, it expresses quantity arithmetically. Since, according to Duchamp, the mediumistic, intuitive artist has no comprehensive idea of what he is doing, the unintentionally expressed always exceeds the unexpressed but intended.

Duchamp's hypothesis was predicated on the belief that the artist is a conduit through which aesthetic value is channelled to the viewer of the work, and that the majority of artistic expression is unintended and unconscious; it is for the spectator to aesthetically evaluate the artist's work. As a consequence, the viewer completes the creative act that the artist has initiated. From this perspective, the role of the artist shares common ground with the traditional role of the curator as a mediator between artists and audiences. A strand of curatorial studies has identified a similar move, albeit in the opposite direction. *In Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, Maria Lind writes that curatorship can be likened to the mixed media practices of artists:

The curatorial is akin to the methodology used by artists focusing on the postproduction approach – that is, the principles of montage, employing

disparate images, objects, and other material and immaterial phenomena within a particular time and space-related framework.

(2012: 12)

If the uptake of such an approach from the position of the artist implies principles of salvage and assembly, from the position of the curator the alignment with the artist makes a claim for the invention and signature of curatorship. In her research project on the concept of the curatorial, Lind stresses the multidimensional role of the curator and poses the question of translation in relation to curatorial praxis, beyond mediation as 'the technical modality of making art go public' (2012: 11). The proposition is that, through interacting with the public, the task of the curator has become an authorial one because displaying and exhibiting art allows for a degree of originality in its production and in the narrative constructed. In this formulation, the curator emerges as a creative figure, yet still acts as a communicator, or translator, in relation to an audience.

However, as Boris Buden has noted, the simplistic equation of translation with communication is problematic in the sense that it assumes an essential message and a model of transmission which facilitates communicative exchange between distinct language communities (2012: 32). In fact, the message is inseparable from its mode of transmission and translating structures the nature of linguistic differences. As Walter Benjamin famously wrote 'any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information [...] something inessential' (1999 [1923]: 70). The case of the curator, Buden suggests, is analogous: the representation of a

viewing public is partly implicated in the mode of address so, if characterized solely by communication, the creative element is diminished, and the role is one of mediation between predetermined audiences and spaces (2012: 35). It is the multidimensional aspect of curatorship, and the plurality and contingency of the range of processes undertaken, that rescues it from a narrow framework of communication. Perhaps it is understandable, then, that such processes have held a fascination for artists but the result is that the dynamic between the artist and the curator has been complicated.

This article will focus on Duchamp, in order to examine the concerns for both parties. The themes of translation and contextual reinterpretation exemplary of his work raise broader questions about subsequent interpretations in exhibitions of his art, and make him an interesting, if difficult, case study for an investigation of translation and the concept of the curatorial. Here, an instance of translation in the original sense is brought into dialogue with the complex relations involved in the idea of translation as a mode of praxis, to test its relevance beyond a communicative frame. The key piece through which these themes will be explored is the *Green Box* (1934)² and the key event is the publication of the English translation of the *Box*, informally known as the *Green Book* (1960),³ by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton.⁴ The exhibitions through which the influence of this event will be traced are *Marcel Duchamp: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Pasadena Art Museum, 1963), *The Almost Complete Works of Duchamp* (Tate Gallery, 1966) and *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012).

The *Green Box* is significant because it has been presented and widely received as a literary counterpart to Duchamp's seminal artwork, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*), also known as the *Large Glass* (1915–23). While there is clearly a relationship between these works, not least because the front of the *Green Box* is inscribed with the name *La mariée mise à nu...*, the former has often fallen prey to assumptions regarding its explanatory function. Such assumptions largely originate in André Breton's 'Phare de la Mariée', or 'The Lighthouse of the Bride', in which he defines the connection between the *Box* and the *Glass* as one of exposition:

To recognize the objective value of *The Bride Stripped Bare*, one requires, in my opinion, some Ariadne's thread that one would seek in vain among the thickets, whether written or drawn, that are contained within this strange green box of published documents.

(1959 [1935]: 92)

This extract was the basis for George Heard Hamilton to state 25 years later that the *Box* was 'Duchamp's elegant invitation to the reader to thread his own way, with the aid of the notes, through the artist's mind' (1960: n.p.). As Susi Bloch argues, though, there is little reason to distinguish in the notes an explanatory account of the *Large Glass*, even if Breton moves toward that conclusion:

As Breton's title indicates, Breton welcomed and accepted the contents of the *Green Box* very specifically as a key to the problematic title and visual apparatus of the *Large Glass*, and since Breton's essay was the first, and an undeniably important, critical essay attempting an interpretation of the *Glass*, all subsequent literature has unquestioningly accepted the premise that the *Green Box* be taken as a dictionary for the reading of the *Glass*. If this is the case, then, as a dictionary, the *Box* demands yet its own dictionary.

(1974: 28)

Bloch challenges the reception of the *Box* as a key or dictionary for reading the *Large Glass*, proposing instead that the notes represent the incomplete realization of an idea that could not be communicated in purely visual or literal terms (see also Lebel 1959: 65).

Taking this observation as a point of departure, the rest of the article will survey how different approaches to Duchamp and his work have resisted and played into theories of the *Green Box* as a verbal exposition, or translation, of the *Large Glass*. The concept of translation is used as a framework for thinking through the curatorial and the artistic process in related but distinct ways. Firstly, to trace the history of the *Green Box*, its relation to the iconography of the *Large Glass* and the influence of the English language translation, and secondly, to consider if and in what sense the role of the curator is akin to that of the translator in exhibitions of Duchamp's work.

These tropes of translation provide an opening for examination of the curatorial strategies in the exhibitions under consideration. All three exhibitions took place after the Hamiltons' 1960 publication of the *Green Box* in English, which contributed to a wider international appreciation of Duchamp's work. In the words of Heard Hamilton the English reader could now 'enjoy one of the most rewarding artistic experiences of modern times' (1960: n.p.). Yet, as suggested, the meaning of the *Large Glass* is not easily resolved through recourse to linguistic translations of the *Box*. The interplay between the multiplicity of interpretation and the insistence of explanation, what Sarat Maharaj has termed 'perfidious fidelity', also characterizes curatorial translations of Duchamp: 'It is at once the success of translation and its 'failure' that marks it as the site of an unceasing tussle between something hard-won out of opacity and the impossibility of transparency' (2001: 27). This tension is implicit in the 'readings' of Duchamp discussed here, the impulse to clarify or make transparent drawing attention to the blind spots and obscurities involved in the process of translation.

1934: *The Green Box*

Published in an edition of 320, the *Green Box* is comprised of 93 separate facsimiles – documents, plans, sketches and notes held in a green felt-covered box, one of three boxes Duchamp produced during his lifetime.⁵ These are reproductions of originals made during the conception of his *Large Glass*, which are sometimes described as preparatory notes. He chose a photomechanical technique to reproduce the printed work, and the *Box* itself is representative of how he compiled the notes, storing them

away in a green cardboard box. Out of the intended edition of 320, Duchamp added to twenty of the boxes one original note, alongside the 93 reproductions.

The publication of the *Box* in 1934 and Breton's essay in *Minotaure* in 1935, followed by the repair of the Large Glass in 1936, appears have been an attempt by Duchamp to revive his artistic career, and to make money through sales of the *Box*, as with the *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–41), evident from his correspondence of 1935 (see Duchamp 2000: 197). Despite these factors, the majority of (English language) critical writing on the *Box* focuses attention less on the circumstances of its production and more on its assumed *raison d'être*, originating in later quotes by Duchamp in the wake of the English translations.

For example, various frequently cited references (e.g. Joselit 1998: 188; Golding 1973: 12) support the view that Duchamp worked meticulously to accurately recreate each note, piece by piece, although comparison with the originals has since contested that the ink and paper of the print boxes are to a large extent different (Shearer and Gould 1999). In a 1954 interview Duchamp outlined his process:

I had all of these thoughts lithographed in the same ink which had been used for the originals. To find paper that was exactly the same, I had to ransack the most unlikely nooks and crannies of Paris.

(Tompkins 1996: 296)

Such ambiguities are generally attributed to Duchamp's subversive playfulness and have become associated with his oeuvre. Because an incredible amount of work would have gone into making subtle variations in the reproductions of the notes, the idea is that Duchamp was deliberately creating a likeness that was somehow unlike. By adding a note from the first box to twenty of the printed editions, he was also effectively destroying the original upon which the copies were based. Commentaries about the principles underlying this mode of production have strengthened the conviction, particularly within the Euro-American hermeneutic tradition, that it was Duchamp's intention to present a challenge to the dichotomy between copy and original, now well established in art historical theory (see e.g. Krauss 1977; de Duve 1991). Yet, it was only in the 1950s that these interpretations began to circulate, there is no indication Duchamp was thinking along these lines in 1934.

In a similar vein, in 1969, some time after the publication of the *Green Box*, Arturo Schwarz published Duchamp's remark that the *Large Glass* was not just an object to be looked at, but a 'wedding of mental and visual reactions' in which 'the ideas [...] are more important than the actual visual realization' (quoted in Schwarz 1969: 7). The context of this comment, originally made in an interview with the Hamiltons in 1959, is relevant in accounting for its transposition into a statement of artistic intent. Subsequently, in his essay accompanying the 1960 English edition of the notes, Richard Hamilton identified the relationship between the *Glass* and the *Box* as one of co-dependency, summing up the juxtaposition of mental and visual elements as follows:

It was his [Duchamp's] intention that the 'Large Glass' should embody the realization of a written text, which had assisted the generation of plastic ideas, and which also carried layers of meaning beyond the scope of pictorial expression. The text exists beside the glass as a commentary and within it as a literary component of its structure. Without the notes the painting loses some of its significance and without the monumental presence of the glass the notes have an air of random irrelevance.

(Hamilton 1960: n.p.)

This view is pervasive; while neither the *Box* nor the *Glass* reveals itself easily, a fluid dialogue between the visual and the textual components unlocks a greater understanding of the works. The problem with the stronger claim of co-dependency is that at the time of the publication of the *Green Box* the broken *Glass* was not on show, still being in the private possession of Katherine Dreier. Hamilton's inferences regarding Duchamp's purpose do not include a consideration of how the works' intended audiences might have attempted their own interpretation of the *Glass* without access to the notes, or vice versa. The issue is complicated further by Duchamp's assertion in a 1964 lecture that the notes 'were to complement the visual experience like a guide book' (1973 [1964]: 296). But again, the guidebook's appearance two years before the repair of the *Glass* makes it difficult to argue that the *Box* constitutes an expositional tool, and that its publication was initially a strategy on Duchamp's part to provide a literary adjunct to the *Glass*. This seeming contradiction would fit in with the

view that Duchamp had a shifting perception of his works (see Hopkins 2005: 153); as Martha Buskirk writes, 'the notes, which only appeared later, were expected to perform a corrective function and to shape the experience of the *Large Glass*' (1994: 114).

These examples illustrate comparable trajectories of artist statements (all made post 1950) becoming embedded in the literature of the *Green Box* and the *Large Glass*, and contributing to a wider view of Duchamp's art. However, Duchamp himself was an uncertain commentator of his own artistic process. Regularly described as 'insoluble', 'enigmatic' and 'ambiguous', his art represents an extension of his apparent reluctance to submit to explanation, a reference point in exhibitions of his work, which evokes the curatorial tension between the artist and the demand to communicate with a viewing public. This tension is manifested differently in each of the shows included here, beginning with the Pasadena Art Museum retrospective.

1963: *Marcel Duchamp: A Retrospective Exhibition, Pasadena Art Museum*

1963 was the year of Duchamp's first retrospective, an exhibition of the then 76-year-old artist's work. At 31, the curator Walter Hopps was relatively young and this was his second show as acting director at the Pasadena Art Museum. Through his contacts, including long-time acquaintances and Duchamp patrons Walter and Louise Arensberg, he managed to assemble 114 works for the exhibition, which were arranged in the Museum's three main galleries. While Hopps commented on Duchamp's limited curatorial involvement – 'truth be told, the choice of what was going to be in this exhibit

was left up to me' (Tashjian 1991: 120) – the understanding that developed between them during preparations influenced the overall shape of the exhibition.⁶

The layout was determined according to thematic groupings within a loose chronological sequence; the first gallery featured mainly canvas works, tracing Duchamp's early Fauvist influences; the theme of chess was the inspiration for the second gallery, which was depicted in paintings and works on paper, as well as in pocket chess boards designed by Duchamp; in the third gallery hung the most famous of Duchamp's Cubist canvases, notably *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, and this led on to the central work of the exhibition, Ulf Lindt's reconstruction of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, flanked by a number of readymades. In Hopps's scheme, the 1934 *Box* was placed close to the *Large Glass* as its literary counterpart, along with other related items, including *Three Standard Stoppages*. It is unlikely the notes were mounted and exhibited individually but it was the first instance of the equivalence between the *Glass* and the *Box* being represented visually and publicly, which would influence subsequent display techniques.

In his execution of the exhibition, Hopps showed an attention to detail without imposing too strongly his own narrative, partly a consequence of having a dialogue with Duchamp throughout. The arrangement maintained a degree of contingency so that various associations could be drawn between the works. As Dickran Tashjian writes of the show in relation to Duchamp's *Box in a Valise*, 'the retrospective represented a temporary dismantling of the box, its objects dispersed among the galleries of the Pasadena Art Museum' (1991: 67). This sense of dispersal also recalls the

Green Box, the random accumulation of notes suggesting a multiplicity of interpretations.

In keeping with the equivocal nature of the retrospective, Hopps's introduction to the exhibition catalogue was aptly titled 'Marcel Duchamp: A System of Paradox in Resonance'. In it, he reflected as much on the figure of Duchamp himself as on his work:

He [Duchamp] ranks with the greatest artists of the century without conscious concern for either greatness or specifically being an artist [...]. Being neither 'anti' nor 'pro' art, he has directly and indirectly furthered the development of many colleagues and modern art in general, without the need to join, warning that art can be 'a habit-forming drug'.

(Hopps 1963: n.p.)

Crucial here is Hopps's recognition of the ambiguous position Duchamp occupied with regard to the role of artist, echoing those sentiments expressed in *The Creative Act*. It is the refusal to commit to a clearly defined position that creates the resonance in his work. These insights were in sharp contrast to extracts from an interview between Duchamp and Richard Hamilton, which were also published in the Pasadena catalogue, Tashjian notes:

Nowhere was Hamilton revealed more at cross-purposes with Duchamp than in two exchanges from an interview [...]. Why wasn't Duchamp 'disappointed' that

the *Large Glass* was not fully understood, why wasn't this work 'completed'? Hamilton's questions were based on expectations pertaining to an artist and his artwork. Proceeding from entirely different assumptions, Duchamp responded that there was no 'necessity to finish it,' that an 'unfinished thing' provides 'more warmth'.

(1991: 68)

Hamilton's observations in the catalogue, while running counter to the spirit of indeterminacy emphasized by Hopps, were, by 1963, already exerting an influence in the field of Duchamp criticism. However, in this exhibition, it was expressed less in the curatorial strategy and more at the level of textual commentary. It was three years later that the logic of Hamilton's earlier remarks would achieve their fullest expression.

1966: *The Almost Complete Works of Duchamp*, Tate Gallery

The 1966 Tate Gallery retrospective was the first to be organized for Duchamp in Europe. Richard Hamilton was invited to curate the exhibition by the Arts Council, having a well-established link to Duchamp, primarily through his work on *The Green Box*. His interest in the *Box* is recorded as dating back to 1947/48, when he first saw Roland Penrose's copy (Alley 1981: 189). A project to decipher the notes followed, which by 1956 had developed into a diagram for reading the *Large Glass*. With Duchamp's encouragement, he began collaborating with George Heard Hamilton in the late 1950s, to continue the task of translation and interpretation that would result in the 1960

publication (see Duchamp 2000: 354). Because he did not read French, he relied on Heard Hamilton to a large extent for the translation. However, he stressed his refusal to accept the most obvious definitions, being mindful of the overall schema, and the concepts that underpinned the words and phrases articulated in the notes (see Hamilton 1999). In an essay that appears at the end of the *Green Book*, Hamilton explains the rationale for the project:

In the treatment of individual notes there was always a clear objective – the attainment of a direct equivalence between the facsimile and the typeset translation. But of course, many factors intervene to make a complete analogy impossible.

(1960: n.p.)

The impossibility of an exact equivalence is acknowledged here, not least because the work was published as a bound volume, in typographic print, therefore necessitating a linear reading of the notes. The system used to order them took account of the subject, the relationship of the subject to the cycle of activity and the chronology (Hamilton 1960: n.p.). Arranged thematically, to correspond with different sections of the *Glass*, the book gave one narrative of the events therein, as the workings of a kind of erotic machine. This mode of organization produced awkward consequences; almost a quarter of the notes did not fit into the linear sequence, which Hamilton maintained was ‘an unavoidable consequence of my attempt to hold the continuity of the rest’ (Hamilton

1960: n.p.). These were deemed to be unrelated to *The Large Glass*, begging the question, why were they included in the printed editions of the *Box*? It is a question of Hamilton's own making, and one that he does not attempt to answer, since the graphical transliteration of the notes gives rise to a somewhat restrictive narrative. Duchamp wrote of it, approvingly, but with a hint of irony:

Your labour of love has given birth to a monster of veracity and a crystalline trans-substation [sic] of the French *Green Box* [...]. The Bride must be blossoming ever more.

(2000: 368)

Unintentionally, in striving for an analogy, the production of the *Green Book* had created a fixed entity of Duchamp's *Green Box* and negated one of its essential elements, the mobility of the notes. The numerous readings implicit in these scraps of paper were applicable to but not entirely explicable of the *Large Glass*. Likewise, the act of translating inevitably dulled the subtlety of meaning in some of the French words. For example, *essence*, meaning petrol, and translated as 'love gasoline' in the *Green Book*, also means in French: alcohol, spirit, *eau de vie*, and genius (also *génie*, also meaning engineering). The multiplicity of words like *essence* again hinted at other readings and trains of thought. The effect of translating, then, both graphically and linguistically, introduced substantial changes, and perhaps the motif of transubstantiation was

appropriate to the extent that it resulted in the production of a materially different work.

Hamilton's tendency to seek fixed meaning would continue to be discernible in his approach to curating the retrospective. But while the notes presented a problem of surplus, the exhibition was characterized by a lack, a deficiency suggested by its title. The 'almost complete' reference is indicative of a preoccupation that reflects Hamilton's frustration at the unfinished state of the *Large Glass*. Ostensibly alluding to the fact that there were a few works missing from the show, including the *Large Glass* itself, his introduction to the exhibition was celebratory but also faintly apologetic:

The present exhibition is remarkable not only in presenting the work of this major artist for the first time in Europe, it is unique in showing him nearly complete. Most of the extant works are here, if the original was not able to travel we have a replica. Only five important things are missing [...]. A lifetime of art is laid before us to experience in moments. We can at last see the artifacts and relate them to their maker.

(Arts Council of Great Britain 1966: n.p.)

In this extract the motivating factor for assembling the works together becomes apparent; the link made between the art and its maker provides the context in which Hamilton wished the exhibition to be viewed, locating it within an authorial frame and consolidating the status of Duchamp as a visionary artist, who was concerned with

'changing the definition of art' (Arts Council of Great Britain 1966: n.p.). Duchamp's purpose is defined in relation to his work and the work is a self-contained corpus, removed from the conditions and circumstances that led to its creation. The claim that anything could be art, which typifies the dominant view of Duchamp, follows from such accounts. It was more pronounced in Hamilton's curatorial approach; pinpointing 1912 as the period after which Duchamp's artistic direction changed, the catalogue entry for the *Green Box* read: 'From now on all Duchamp's energies were to be devoted to completely new considerations on the nature of art and to resolving these ideas into a formal entity which would permit the greatest freedom of intellectual activity' (Arts Council of Great Britain 1966: 44). Compared with Hopps, who was reticent even about calling Duchamp an artist, Hamilton relied to a greater extent on conceptions of artistic purpose in his development of the exhibition. Part of the reason for this conviction was possibly due to his identification with Duchamp as a fellow artist. Although he had taken on the role of translator and curator with regard to Duchamp's art, in both instances the nature of his engagement with him inclined more towards the idea of creative authorship; it was less the performative aspects of Duchamp's practice – the system – than the occasion for revealing meaning that interested him.

The construction of a copy of *The Large Glass* offers a good example of Hamilton's working method and his experience as an artist coming to the fore. Because the original was too fragile to loan after its repair in 1936, he sought funding to create a reconstruction for the exhibition, assembling it from his own reading of the notes. This decision represents both an extension of the *Green Book* project and a conscious uptake

of the artistic strategies he attributed to Duchamp. Hamilton was less interested in producing an exact likeness, like the earlier rendering developed by Ulf Lindt from photographs of the original. Instead he wanted to capture the subject matter of the *Glass*. A full scale replica drawing provided the template for the new model, and he created a number of tracings and perspective studies before starting construction (Alley 1981: 190).

While it could be argued that Hamilton's methodology was largely determined by his linear reading of the notes, the opportunity to go through that artistic process enabled him to test the theory, inherited from Breton, that the *Green Box* provided the key to understanding the *Large Glass*. The result of his undertaking remains uncertain. Commenting on the notes and the reconstruction over 35 years later, Hamilton admitted 'as a *literal* translation it was a bit difficult to grasp' (Tusa 2002, emphasis added). This allusion to literal translation recalls the problem outlined by Benjamin, and the tendency of instrumental translations to transmit only information. Nevertheless, he held that the notes were an insight into the workings of Duchamp's artistic mind, and the *Box* was placed next to the reconstruction in the exhibition to stress the function of exposition between them. However, there was one feature of the copy that differed strikingly from the original, which sums up an important part of Hamilton's project. The reconstruction was fashioned in armourplate glass, for practical reasons and to avoid the fate of the fragile original. Duchamp signed it 'Richard Hamilton, pour copie conforme, Marcel Duchamp, 1965' or 'for a faithful replica' (see Alley 1981: 191), in keeping with his earlier reference to the monstrous 'veracity' of the *Green Book*. That

invulnerability and permanence evoked by the new glass can be taken as a metaphor for the galvanizing effect of Hamilton's wider project, and its continuing influence on interpretations of Duchamp's work.

2012: *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg and Duchamp*, Philadelphia Museum of Art

The Philadelphia Museum of Art's 2012 group exhibition traced the influence of Duchamp on the composer John Cage, choreographer Merce Cunningham and the artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.⁷ The show explored the reinvention of Duchamp through four figures who were inspired by him. Just as the English translation of the *Box* in 1960 would allow for wider readings and interpretations of his work, so Johns' painted bronzes or Rauschenberg's *Bicycle Wheel*-inspired sculpture would popularize the idea that anything could be art for a new generation and consolidate Duchamp's reputation as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. In that sense, the exhibition was led by these more recent translators of his work, and the layout reflected the relationships between them.

The works were arranged thematically into four sections to draw out affinities and shared preoccupations, while complementing the permanent installation of the original *Large Glass* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Modern and Contemporary Gallery. 'The Bride' focused on the resonances of Duchamp's seminal artwork; 'Chance' combined sounds and artworks, including several readymades, to highlight the element

that unlocked 'the previously insulated compartments of art and life' (Basualdo and Battle 2012: 23); 'The Main Stage' featured performances from the former Merce Cunningham Dance Company, surrounded by the stage set that Johns constructed for *Walkaround Time* (1968) that replicates portions of the *Large Glass* onto seven plastic objects; finally, 'Chess' documented both the professional and personal exchanges the artists had with one another, as well as the importance of chess in fostering some of these relationships. As the curators Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle put it in the elegant anthology compiled to accompany the exhibition, 'our guidance would come from their [Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg] relationships - each variable and complex - with Marcel Duchamp' (2012: 20).

[Fig. 2] *The Bride and the Bachelors Duchamp with Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns* (2013), installation view. Photo: © Felix Clay 2013, courtesy of the Barbican Art Gallery.

The combination of such high profile artists and artworks was reflected in the media response to the exhibition. In comparison with the first retrospective, which received relatively little attention outside Los Angeles, the Philadelphia show garnered international press and was attended by the elites of the art world. Nowhere was the sheen of celebrity more in evidence than at the opening of the exhibition, as one review recalled:

Giant chocolate bachelors on sumptuous beds of raspberries graced the vast U-shaped table on the museum's balcony, where 228 invited guests were surrounded by a spectacular series of Rubens tapestries known as 'The History of Constantine the Great'. They feasted on branzino, one for each diner, served intact - head, tail and all. When it was time for dessert, an attractive woman dressed in white passed through with a hammer and reduced the chocolate bachelors to toothsome bites.

(Kazanjian 2012)

Here, the bride is transformed into a fashion model, and the bachelors are, quite literally, served up to an audience of hungry consumers, an apt metaphor through which Duchamp's status as an icon and his significance in the contemporary art market are confirmed.⁸ In this wider cultural reception of the artist's work, it is possible to perceive elements of the curatorial beyond the artistic frame, what Lind calls the 'technical modality of making art go public' (2012: 11).

As its title indicates, the focal point for the show was the image of the *Bride*, and her various re-imaginings. Parallels with Duchamp's key work were carefully emphasized, as in the instructions for handling glass imprinted on Rauschenberg's untitled silkscreen print or the 1978 outline of the bride by Johns (Basualdo and Battle 2012: 23). The significance of the *Green Box* was also recognized and the copy on display came from Johns's private collection, lent especially for the show. Johns's detailed study and re-statement of the notes, likened by Dorothy Kosinski to a direct conversation with

Duchamp, is demonstrated in works such as *Litanies of the Chariot* (1961), which contains a passage from one note, transcribed into bold block letters and drawn over with pencil strokes. The text itself is a list of terms, 'slow life', 'horizontal', 'vicious circle', quoted from the Hamiltons' translated volume (see Kosinski 2005: 57). As Johns wrote in his original review of the *Green Book*, 'finally all the notes from the *Green Box* are published in English, and Richard Hamilton has arranged them typographically so one may follow the chronological development of the invention of the Bride and her bachelors' (1975 [1960]: 110). Rauschenberg, too, emulated the diagrams and line drawings of the *Box* and the exhibition called attention to the inscription from Heard Hamilton's 1957 translation on the surface of his *Combine, Wager* (1957-59) (Basualdo and Battle 2012: 21).

The curators discerned in these artists' points of intersection with Duchamp, a 'tangible desire to be together and to animate each other' (Basualdo and Battle 2012: 24). However, from the selections in the anthology it is evident that this implied intimacy encompassed different levels of interpretation and varying degrees of understanding. It was Cage who perhaps formed the closest relationship with him, using the excuse that he wanted to improve at chess, as a means of spending more time in his company. In an interview, he spoke of Duchamp's rationale with regard to the readymades:

He [Duchamp] didn't do what we have since done - extend the notion of the readymades to everything. He was very precise, very disciplined. It must've been a very difficult thing for him to make a readymade, to come to that

decision. But then later in life, while he was making *Etant donnees*, he would sign anything that anyone asked him to.

(quoted in Basualdo and Battle 2012: 132)

Cage's statement captures something of the trajectory of Duchamp's life and art, showing insight into the artist's working methods. Like the readymades, the *Green Box* offers two possible modes of reading; a precise narrative or a set of random and fluid permutations. It is a duality that runs throughout Duchamp's work, and is revealing of the ambivalent impulse that allowed for the interpretation, translation and ultimately reinvention of Duchamp in the three exhibitions that have been the focus of this discussion. In the Philadelphia show, the originality of the curatorial strategy was brought out in the attention given to relationships. As a subtle modification of the theme of artistic influence, it perhaps represents a return to the associative logic of the Pasadena retrospective but one that makes the play of artistic and curatorial principles more explicit.

Looking at Seeing: The Task of the Curator

The trope of translation that was the starting point for our study has been elaborated in two ways in this article: by tracing the significance of the English translation project that would ultimately find form in the Hamiltons' *Green Book* and through examining the role of the curator in relation to that of the translator in exhibitions of Duchamp's work. In the first instance, the fragmentary narrative of the 1934 *Green Box* is rendered

differently in its English translation. The sequential binding of the notes fixes the story of the *Bride*; from Hamilton's comments in the Pasadena catalogue to his reconstruction of the *Large Glass*, following its narrative, to the English quotation inscribed on Rauschenberg's *Combine* at the Philadelphia show, what we describe as the galvanizing effect of the *Green Book* is clear. However, it also creates a problem of surplus, thereby missing the sense in which the *Green Box* and the *Large Glass* are mutually constitutive of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, while failing to account entirely for each other. The complex relationship that Hopps identified as a system of paradox is the other face of translation in Duchamp's work.

This duality of translation potentially allows for a re-appraisal of the dynamics between the curator and the translator, and the curator and the artist. The task of interpreting texts and spaces has revealed that communication with an audience carries with it the risk of defining that audience within narrow parameters, specifically through linguistic difference in the example of the *Green Book*. The surplus produced by that translation also drew attention to the inevitability of selection, and its reverse condition, exclusion. As to the curator-artist relation, here the convergence of practices undertaken by both has had unexpected consequences. For Hopps, the exhibition took on elements of Duchamp's art, while questioning the position of its artist. Hamilton, simultaneously translator, curator and artist, highlighted the multidimensional aspects of putting together an exhibition, though he was perhaps unable to reconcile these roles in relation to Duchamp; for him, the tension between the ambiguity of narrative and the imposition of meaning demanded a resolution. In the Philadelphia exhibition, the

artistic-curatorial parallels were more apparent, and the focus on artists' relationships with Duchamp as proto-curator resulted in a fuller exploration of the plurality of his work.

These three exhibitions all share a concern with the medium of the exhibition space as part of the process by which meaning is recorded or translated, what Duchamp, in reference to his own art, would call 'looking at seeing'.⁹ The idea of looking at seeing goes right to the heart of the curatorial and mirrors the method of the translator to the extent that they are both critical and reflexive practices. As our argument suggests, just as the 'wedding of mental and visual reactions' exemplified in the *Green Box* and the *Large Glass* has raised questions of translation for curators of Duchamp, so curatorial studies is now posing questions about translation in relation to curatorship, art and the wider public context. Furthermore, if translation defines a mode of praxis beyond art, the task of the curator can be re-thought through the expanded definition of translation as a technical modality – of communication, organization, interpretation and a range of other processes – constituted in but not reducible to these functions. The relational structure of such processes is indicative of a multiplicity of sites and audiences, which productively unsettles conventional modes of curatorship and the context for curatorial interventions.

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¹ For a fuller examination of these methods and the *traduction juxtalinéaire* ('line by line translation'), see Thompson (2008).

² The copy of *La Mariée mise à Nu par ses Célibataires, même* ('The Green Box') consulted during the research for this article is held at Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, BC Read C1800.

³ Nicknamed the *Green Book*, its formal title is *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, A Typographical Version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's Green Box*, translated by George Heard Hamilton.

⁴ For the remainder of this article, references to 'Hamilton' indicate Richard Hamilton and references to 'Heard Hamilton' indicate George Heard Hamilton.

⁵ Duchamp also published 16 notes in the *Box of 1914* and 79 notes in the *White Box* (1966).

⁶ For example, Duchamp's insistence on including *Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood* (1953) in the exhibition.

⁷ The exhibition toured to the Barbican Art Centre, London as *The Bride and the Bachelors* (2013).

⁸ Duchamp's association with fashion was in fact established much earlier. For example, the cover of *Vogue* magazine (July 1945) featured a section of the *Large Glass* in the foreground with the model (bride) behind it.

⁹ In the *Box of 1914*, one of the 16 facsimile notes reads 'one can look at seeing; one can't hear hearing'. See Bloch (1974) for an extended discussion of this theme.