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Fat and failure: Marcel Duchamp's military imagination

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Abstract

Marcel Duchamp's preoccupation with the French army can be seen in a note he included in the 'Box of 1914'. The note is known as Éloignement*, and with it he declares his opposition to military conscription and then speculates that the army might 'telephonically' reconnect the limbs and organs of its soldiers that have been left scattered across the battlefield. Duchamp wrote this note before field telephones were issued to French troops but his grotesque proposition can be seen in light of his experience as an army corporal.*

In 1912, before making these caustic suggestions Duchamp had taken a motor journey and written an account of it where he describes the aggressive invasion of territory by an alien force. This invasion travelled from France's liminal frontiers to its metropolitan centre. His text is known as the Jura-Paris Road *and again Duchamp reveals his military concerns. He formulates territory that proceeds from topographical amplitude to the delimitation of a straight line. In spite of its sophisticated morphology, it is threatened by alien forces aimed at testing boundaries. Duchamp published his text as a facsimile of his handwritten original, which displays the amendments and uncertainties of a man of military age attempting to evade the imperatives of military service.*

The essay continues with an analysis of Duchamp's influences in writing this text and suggests a link with the philosopher Edmund Husserl in the context of the profoundly anti-German atmosphere in the French military build-up to war between 1912 and 1914. The argument closes with a survey of a military thematic in Duchamp's work after he left France for America in 1915.

Keywords

Marcel Duchamp
military failure
field telephones
'Jura-Paris road'
proprioception
French corporals

Fat and failure: Marcel Duchamp's military imagination

> *Lard ou saindoux sculpté de charcutier, est-ce du lard culinaire ou de la ménager! Et pourquoi pas le gros lard militaire?*[1]
>
> (Marcel Duchamp (1926), quoted in Sarazin-Levassor (2004: 39))

Marcel Duchamp's preoccupation with military failure in the context of the French build-up to war in 1914 can be seen in notes, ready-mades and paintings made between 1911 and 1918. This preoccupation can be determined by his lengthy appeal to the army boards for an exemption on medical grounds that began in 1909 and which only received final approval in January 1915 (Duchamp 2000: 29). In failing the medical examination he would then avoid the war; the outcome of which he would discuss in

1. If a butcher makes a sculpture out of lard or *saindoux*, is it culinary or domestic lard? And what about […] the lard of war? (Duchamp cited in Sarazin-Levassor 2008: 70).
'Lard, fat, means the same in French and English, but in French is a homophone of *L'art*. Duchamp puns

grotesquely on culinary lard/art […] The punning reaches a climax with a lard of war – in the original "*gros lard militaire*", a combination of *gros lard* (fat slob) and *l'art militaire* (the art of war). As a noun *militaire* means soldier, so "*gros lard militaire*" is also the disrespectful "fat military slob". *Saindoux* is another word for lard, and the military slang for a corporal is *saindoux*.'

The extracts above are from the translator Paul Edwards's note accompanying Lydie Fischer Sarazin-Levassor's 'The Room Stripped Bare, Even', published in *Tate etc* (2008).

gloomy letters to friends, whom he was secretly planning to visit in New York. He finally sailed to America in June 1915 with a military clearance for what he would describe in interviews as a 'heart murmur' or an *insufficences cardiaque*, although his French Army papers – as well as later ones for the American draft – omit any reference to this medical condition (Caumont and Gough-Cooper 1993: unpaginated).[2] It is perhaps paradoxical that although he appeared to have freed himself from army duties, military themes would, nevertheless persist in his work – particularly with regard to failures of judgement and when they affected the experience of ordinary soldiers. This theme appeared as a recognizable thread in his work over the next twelve years, perhaps even longer and arguably continuing until the mid-1940s when he was well beyond military age.

Overt military references appear in Marcel Duchamp's work as early as 1905, the year of his conscription, although recent scholarship has suggested that his juvenilia dating back to 1892 should be considered as well.[3] However, the appearance of a more encoded and problematic compulsion to itemize aspects of military life, particularly systems that fail, can be traced to his painting *Coffee Mill* of 1911. The painting, ostensibly the representation of a common kitchen utensil, painted diagrammatically in a manner that parodies

2. I am grateful to Jennifer Gough-Cooper for the term *insufficences cardiaque*, from an e-mail correspondence 11th April 2005. The reference to the 'heart murmur' appears in 'Ephemerides' listed under 24 October.

3. For further information, see this author's 'Military Avoidance: Marcel Duchamp and the "Jura-Paris road"', *Tate Papers*, Spring 2006.

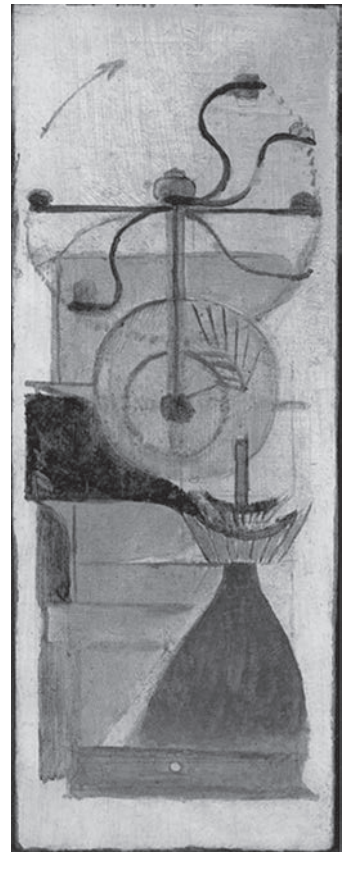


Figure 1: Marcel Duchamp (1911), Coffee Mill. © *Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2006, ADAGP/Paris. DACS, London.*

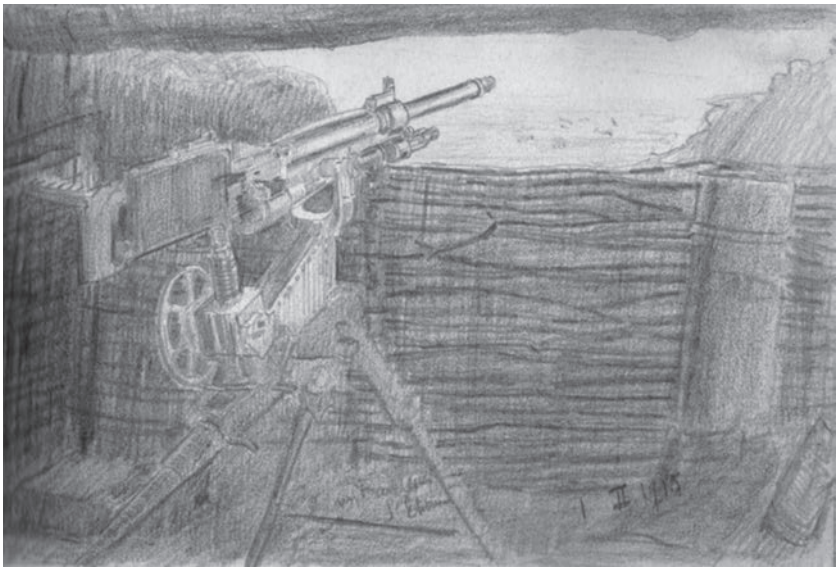


Figure 2: R. Trémolières (1915), Machine Gun Manufactured by Saint-Étienne. *Courtesy Louis Trémolières. http://pagesperso-orange.fr/donjondecoucy/tremolieres/Carnets/carnet5/page24.htm*

cubist methodologies, conveys in its title an allusion to military slang. This specifies the name given to the French heavy machine-guns, manufactured first at the Puteaux arsenal and then at the armaments factories at Saint-Étienne. The Puteaux weapon was in service in 1905 during Duchamp's active year in the infantry when he rose to the rank of corporal. Even then it was referred to by the troops as *le moulin à café*; the eponymous title, in is original French, of Duchamp's innocuous little painting of 1911. Unreliable and cheaply made, the Puteaux and subsequent Saint-Étienne machine-guns reflected the general disdain of commanding officers towards defensive weapons and strategies as being unworthy of the national *élan* and fighting spirit of the army (Lyons 2006: 10). French military strategy was predicated on waves of attacking infantry who failed to adapt their tactics in the face of devastatingly effective automatic fire. Between August and December 1914 the French army lost a quarter of the casualties it would sustain over the entire period of the war.

Duchamp's painting makes an unexpected appearance in a cartoon for the German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* in 1916 where the simple kitchen device becomes monstrously exaggerated into an engine of mass destruction. In the cartoon, a wounded German soldier looks at a battle scene that includes Duchamp's coffee mill spewing out dismembered bodies, while muttering to himself that war was never as bad as that (Caumont and Gough-Cooper 1993: unpaginated). Admittedly, Duchamp's preoccupation related to military failures rather than machines that replicated the carnage of the western front, nevertheless the metaphor indicts the painting, perhaps even its author, into the alliance of art and war that is reminiscent of dada accusations. Once initiated they become difficult to dismiss. It is unusual to find Duchamp at the butt end of this form of criticism, which in other circumstances he might have triggered himself.

Any consideration of Duchamp's thinking at this time – and the preoccupation with military failure should be included here – has to be applied to his flawed masterwork *La mariée mis a nus par ces célibataires, même*, or *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors*, *Even*, commonly known as the *Large Glass*. The planning phase of this work began in 1912 with Duchamp's note entitled the 'Jura-Paris Road' and it was eventually declared 'definitively unfinished' in 1926 when it met with its shattering accident and the glass substrate splintered irreparably while in transit – and so its period of development and catastrophic moment of completion span the critical years of 1914–18. Given Duchamp's preoccupations at this time, it is perhaps inevitable that the *Large Glass* would become a repository of his responses to a variety of military deficiencies. It presents, for instance, the regulation bayonet – an object of menacing appearance but of little practical value, on or off the battlefield, tending to snap or bend when opening tin cans and other unorthodox applications that became a necessary feature of military life (Embleton and Sumner 1995: 21). A truncated version is seen here, presented in the improvised method of troops who have to manage with limited means. In this case Duchamp uses it to secure the workings of the 'Chocolate Grinder', itself the unreliable centrepiece of the malfunctioning lower section of the *Large Glass*.

Next to the 'Chocolate Grinder' he stations a huddle of dispirited male characters. These are held in an uncomfortable alignment at the punctum of their genitals, or at least at the punctum of where their genitals would have been if they had had any, because as Duchamp tells us, they neither possess them nor any other internal or external organs. As hollowed out husks, uniformed entities only, they attempt to do their duty by providing

Figure 3: O. Gulbransson (1916), '"The War" they call this picture? Well, it's not as dreadful as that', Simplicissimus*, 16 May 1916.*

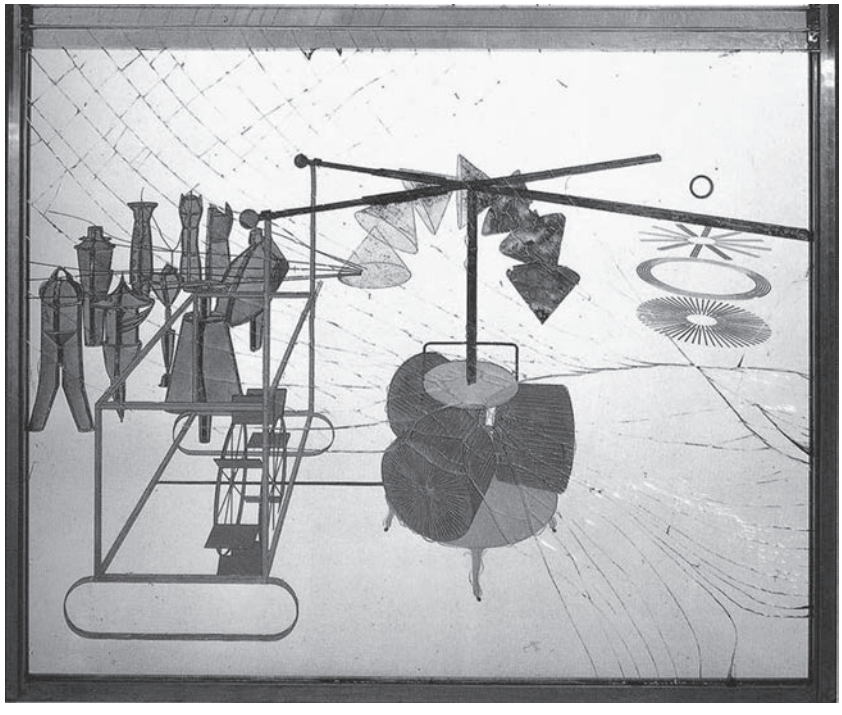


Figure 4: M. Duchamp (1915–23), The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even. © *Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2006, ADAGP/Paris. DACS, London.*

one single service in satisfying the sexual desires of the bride who inhabits the alien zone in the pane of glass above their heads. Although programmed to fail in this capacity, they sublimate their differing needs into the service of this solitary, unrewarding objective. Duchamp's compulsion to list the futile routines and repetitions of conscripted military life is implicitly made here. To emphasize his point he designates his disempowered male nonentities under the collective title of the 'Cemetery of Uniforms'.

The 'Cemetery of Uniforms', first devised in 1913, carries within it a more specific reference to the army by including, amongst the inventory of male stereotypes, a cavalryman from the regiment of *cuirassiers*. These troops were by now representatives of an earlier military order and although splendidly dressed and embodying patriotic fervour they proved to be ill-equipped for the mobile war that would rip through northern France in August 1914. The emblematic *cuirassier* is exemplified in a series of sculptures culminating in the rearing *Grand Cheval* of 1912–14 by Duchamp's elder brother, Raymond Duchamp-Villon. Raymond was the recipient of the little *Coffee Mill* painting of 1911 and his studio in Puteaux lent to the gift a topical relevance in light of the failed Puteaux machine-guns being manufactured close by. Duchamp-Villon, a cavalry reservist, synthesizes in his sculpture the swagger and armoured confidence of the cavalry theme and conveys the misplaced *élan* that sustained the *cuirassier* regiments in the popular imagination.[4] Perhaps more realistically, a British army report into French military preparedness stated that troops in uniforms such as these were a liability and more appropriate to the operatic stage than the field of battle (War Office 1912: 30).

4. Although not a *cuirassier,* Raymond Duchamp-Villon's cavalry status is supported by the Tate Gallery where he is described as: 'an expert horseman, serving as an auxiliary doctor in a cavalry regiment during the war' (http://www.tate.org.uk). However, Caumont & Gough-Cooper note that at the time of his death he was serving in a medical unit of the 68th Heavy Artillery (Caumont and Gough-Cooper 1993: 7th October 1918 unpaginated). Presumably he was transferred from the cavalry to the artillery when the exigencies of trench warfare changed the military requirement.

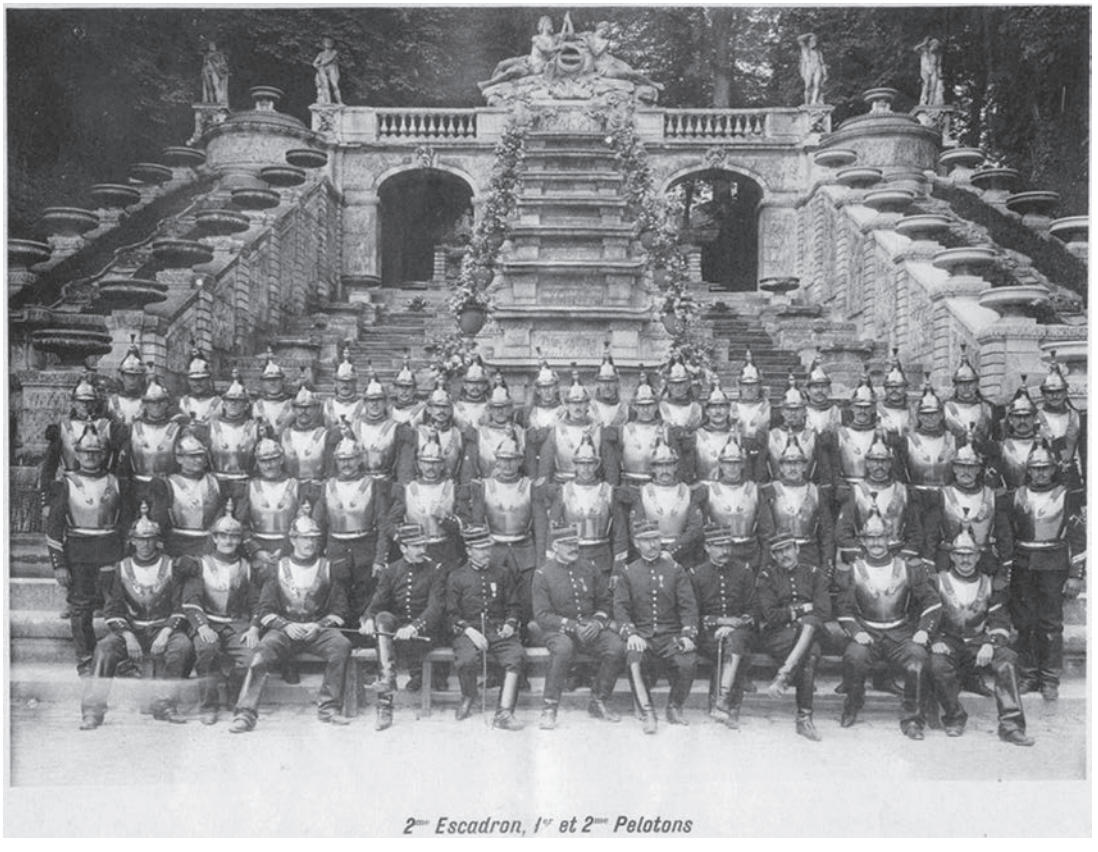


Figure 5: Photographer unknown (1902), 1st Cuirassier, 2nd Squadron, 1st and 2nd Companies 1902*,* Paris. *http://www.military-photos.com/1cuir1.htm. Accessed 23 January 2005*.

It is consistent with Duchamp's critical stance that the regiment selected for inclusion in his disconsolate 'Cemetery' would be the antiquated *cuirassiers* who, although vulnerable to modern weapons, retained their misplaced appeal in the popular imagination. An illustration of the disparity between this regiment that enshrined a national mystique of heroic determination and its antiquated, outmoded reality could be seen in the *salle des marriages* at the *hôtel de ville* in the town of Neuilly where Duchamp was living. Here, in 1913, the academic painter Albert Aublet (1851–1938) unveiled his frieze on the stages of life, in which *Jeunesse* or 'Youth' was epitomized by a young *cuirassier* steadying his rearing charger while his young bride clings to him in a final appeal before he turns away to obey the call of duty. The competing themes of marital and national obligation to which Aublet refers were the ones that Duchamp, working in Neuilly at the same time, began to problematize with his own *cuirassier* as one of the conscripted bachelors of the *Large Glass*. However, the lofty ideals and nobility of gesture, the abnegation and abstention from desire in Aublet's *cuirassier* become redirected, in Duchamp, towards the mechanized eroticism and sexual antagonism of the *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*.

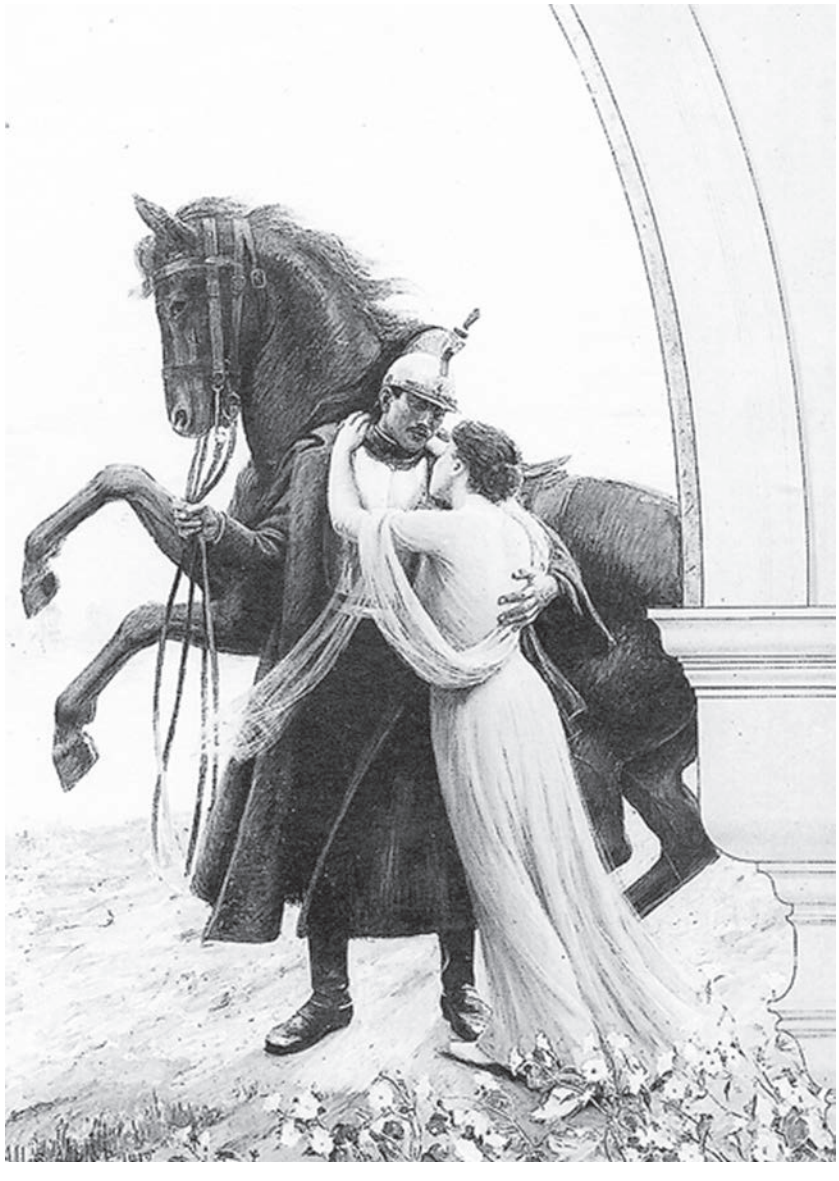


Figure 6: A. Aublet (1913), 'Jeunesse'*, in F. Robichon (1998),* L'Armée française vue par les peintres*:* 1870–1914*, Paris: Ministère de la Défense, p. 133.*

The *Éloignement* note in the *Box of 1914*

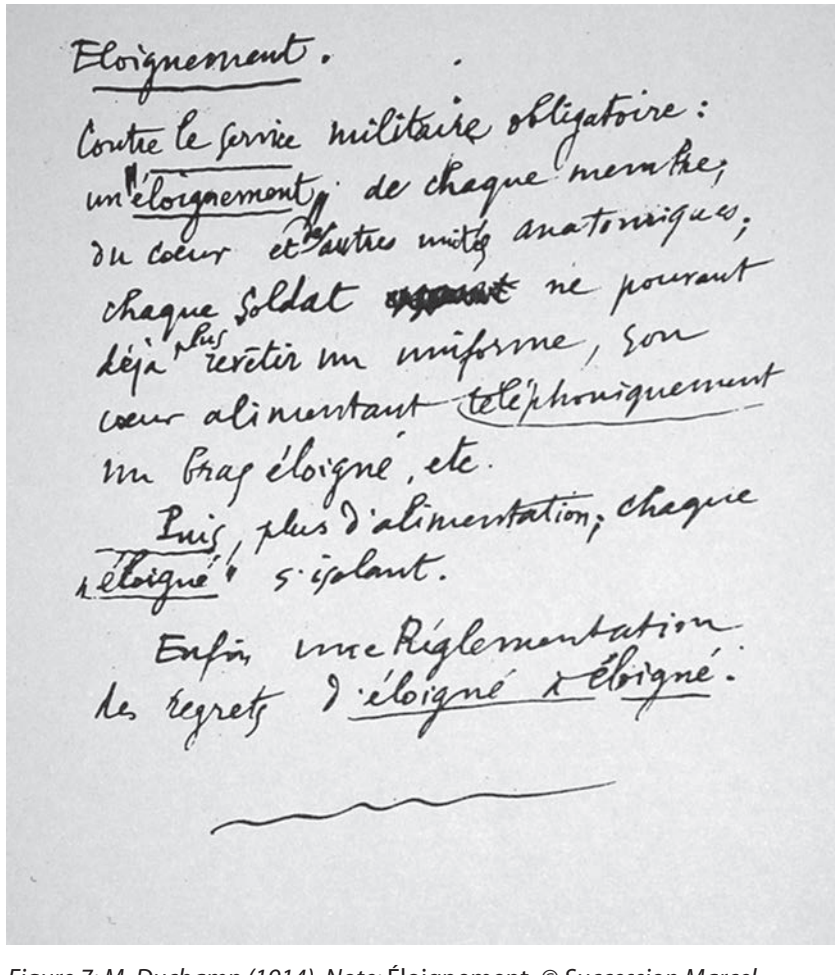
Deferment (*Éloignement*)
Against compulsory military service: a '*deferment*' of each limb, of the heart and other anatomical parts; each soldier being already unable to put his uniform on again, his heart feeding *telephonically*, a deferred arm, etc.

Then no further supply; each '*deferee*' limb is isolated. Finally a Regulation of regrets from *one 'deferee' to another*.[5]

(Duchamp 1973: 23)

5. The italicised emphasise are drawn directly from Michel Sanouillet's transcription into book form, although Duchamp's original manuscript has the words underlined.

Marcel Duchamp's military preoccupation is most clearly stated in the '*Éloignement*' note (printed above) from the *Box of 1914*, which announces his unambiguous opposition to military conscription. This note carries, of course, a direct personal message in light of the prolonged appeal against the army medical boards. Duchamp's note takes a macabre twist with the suggestion that the army might salvage something out of catastrophe by reconnecting the dispersed limbs and organs of its damaged soldiers. These might function, albeit temporarily as an interconnected configuration instead of being abandoned on the battlefield as useless remnants. They would be revitalized and somehow re-engaged through a process of *téléphonique* communication. Technical information is sparse here and perhaps prudently Duchamp refrains from further operational or executive detail. Nevertheless, the image establishes a counterpoint to the 'Cemetery of Uniforms', where entire bodies have disappeared without any damage done to their uniforms. With the occupants gone the indexical uniform, now the container for a reservoir of compressed gas that replicating the absent body, fuels the libido of the sadly


Éloignement.

Contre le service militaire obligatoire:
un éloignement de chaque membre,
du cœur et autres unités anatomiques;
chaque Soldat ne pouvant
déjà plus revêtir un uniforme, son
cœur alimentant téléphoniquement
un bras éloigné, etc.

Puis, plus d'alimentation; chaque
éloigné s'isolant.

Enfin, une Réglementation
des regrets d'éloigné à éloigné.

Figure 7: M. Duchamp (1914), Note: Éloignement. © *Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2006, ADAGP/ Paris. DACS, London.*

malfunctioning apparatus. The *téléphonique* note, in contrast, voices the concern that dispersed bodies might have difficulty finding their way back into uniform once the repair work has been telephonically completed. Duchamp finishes the thought by suggesting that although some form of order has been restored, the singular nature of these reconfigured and reassembled bodies will have trouble conforming to the normalizing standards of military life.

The motivation for writing this cynical note remains unclear, but some sort of light is shed when we learn that Duchamp wrote his note in 1914 while the government had yet to approve the funds to provide its army with field telephones. And so, his bizarre recommendation adopts the terse humour of troops when faced with the military shortcomings of their superiors. It reveals, also, an awareness of the gap between the needs of soldiers on the one hand and the abilities of the political establishment to interpret these needs on the other. During the retreat through France in the autumn of 1914 the French army was forced to use civilian telephones, or what remained of them, in the shattered towns that they passed through. German forces, already equipped with mobile telephones could communicate more easily. It was not until they came within range of the stronger transmitter on the Eiffel Tower that the French postal service was able to jam the German communications. With the *Éloignement* note, Duchamp's compulsion to list military deficiency is now explicitly made. The language and methodology he employs is equally revealing.

Marcel Duchamp's title of '*Éloignement*', has been translated variously as 'deferment' in '*Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand du sel)*' edited by Michel Sanouillet and translated by Elmer Peterson (1973: 23) or as 'removal' by Arturo Schwarz (1997: 603) but these versions miss the military associations of this note. I suggest that the noun 'detachment' might be more appropriate. 'Detachment' conveys an impassive quality that inflects the general meaning while being dispassionate about the collateral of devastated limbs torn from bodies and abandoned by departing military groups. A detachment is also a military unit that separates from the main body to go off on a particular mission.

Problematically, however, the noun 'detachment' invokes Duchamp's attitude of 'indifference' although his 'detachment' here fails to achieve the objectivity of his later aphorisms and declarations. We associate Duchamp with deadpan lines such as 'There is no solution because there is no problem' (Janis 1953: 24) suggesting an aptitude for circumventing issues that would ordinarily pose problems and interfere with normal decision-making. Conversely, the '*téléphonique*' note indicates a troubled episode, if only for the limited period when, confronted by the very real possibility that as an infantry corporal Duchamp might summarily be ordered to rejoin his unit – particularly after the casualties in the retreat from Charleroi, involving his regiment in the late summer of 1914. In later years, while attempting to 'detach' himself from the emotional investment typical of art-world practice in post-world-war America, he would divert attention away from this troubling period and towards a more benign form of detachment. Nevertheless, the terrible phrases in the *Éloignement* note prompt us to imagine that the 'detachments' exercising Marcel Duchamp, in the autumn and winter of 1914, in conformity with others of his generation, were the indiscriminate ruptures caused by the solutions to military problems.

Then no further supply; each '*detached*' limb is isolated. Finally a Regulation of regrets from one '*detachment*' to another.

(Duchamp 1973: 23 [excisions and additions by this author, italic emphasise by Sanouillet and Peterson])

The note was written in Paris, duplicated and given to friends for safe-keeping during the opening battles of the war. The invasion was finally turned away from Paris at the battle of the Marne in September 1914, but in the process France lost a swathe of territory that included its productive industrial and mining regions. We might see, therefore, in the malfunctioning apparatus of the industrial, lower half of the *Large Glass* a reflection – perhaps more than a reflection – a consequence of this lost manufacturing capacity. If the 'Glass', with its provisional and erratic means of supply, its chronic failure to deliver, its shattered and fragmented array of disconnected components, matches this loss of territory – then the cynical measures advanced in the '*téléphonique*' note must surely be viewed as a morbid further extension of this upheaval. Duchamp's resolve to abandon, not only his regiment, but his family, friends and any association with French cultural determinism has to be seen in this light: 'I am not going to New York,' he wrote to Walter Pach in April 1915, 'I am leaving Paris,' and added 'That's quite different' (Duchamp 2000: 36).

The 'Jura-Paris Road', proprioception and phenomenology

In an earlier note in 1912, written after a trip to the Jura on the frontiers of eastern France, Marcel Duchamp first began to develop a theme of territorial unease that was related to the developing crisis. By using the language of travel to describe the interventions of an alien force crossing a familiar terrain, Duchamp comments on a crisis in French culture that was predicated on religion, art, militarism and territorial conquest – all of which would be disrupted by the German invasion of 1914. Duchamp's journey, two years before the invasion, went from the liminal borders of France to its metropolitan centre. This was an exhausting process that will have tested the endurance of its participants as well as their automobile. They travelled, nevertheless, in greater comfort than the invading armies or the exhausted French divisions retreating before them in 1914. Duchamp's note of this journey is known as the 'Jura-Paris Road' and it attracts attention because here, for the first time, he indicates the interdisciplinary approach that would become his own and which, in its turn, would point to the varied methodologies of the *Large Glass* (Duchamp 1973: 26–27). Equally pertinent is the disquieting undercurrent that ignores typical descriptions of the sights, sounds, the interactions and conversations between passengers on a motor journey. Instead his protagonists move forward in a practised effortless way, communicating telepathically across a broad terrain that ultimately yields to their authority. In doing so Duchamp's road succumbs to the delimitation of an 'ideal' straight line, which in turn probes and tests boundaries in the achievement of territorial control. Duchamp's theme of invasion overpowers the language of motor travel to such an extent that references to roads or motor cars scarcely appear. At one point he refers to *silex*, the French for flint, which became the term for the layer of sharp stones just below the surface that became such a hazard to automobile tyres, otherwise there is

little or no reference to motor transport or its vicissitudes. The sense of an inexorable advance into a territory that requires exacting coordination and synchronization replaces alternative themes of a less exacting intention.

Motor travellers experience a measure of physical intimacy in the cramped confinement of their vehicle when restlessly they change position requiring a responsive realignment of fellow passengers. Advancing soldiers do something similar as they move towards military objectives, while compensating for unexpected movement from comrades caused by uneven terrain. The relative qualities of ease and awkwardness will vary between touring motorists and reconnoitring soldiers, but this awareness of the proximity of fellow passengers on the one hand and the discrepancies in the forward momentum of advancing troops on the other is equally familiar. Their incorporation into a unifying organism corresponds to the phenomenon in consciousness where the body monitors, coordinates and communicates its messages as an integrated whole.

This communication is responsible for spatial perception and accounts for the simplest daily activities as well as more dramatic events where a response to the rapid trajectory of approaching objects is intuitively calculated by the subject. This process alleviates the need of consciously calculating the intentional momentum and velocity of an object and applies whether the response is to an approaching vehicle, or to enemy fire. The propensity for subject awareness with respect to moving objects involves a condition that would be developed in the writing of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) who used the term 'proprioception' in terms of an interactive relationship between objects, space and a perceiving subject, and although his definitions came later than Duchamp's road trip, his term is used here in lieu of anything more appropriate at the time.

Merleau-Ponty was four years old in 1912 and was more likely to have been engrossed with the things within his grasp on the nursery floor when the Jura journey occurred. So an earlier model will be required if the conceptions of space and subjectivity that Duchamp alludes to in these notes are to conform to any precedent beyond his own imagination. In 1907 the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) had delivered his findings in what came to be known as the 'Thing and Space Lectures'. In these Husserl began, minutely, to reason into existence the changes and relationships between 'things' from a provisional, almost theoretical stage as raw data towards their phenomenological presentation as they gradually affect the perceptions of a viewing subject (Bowie 2003: 185). These changes begin in a conditional 'phantom' state before even the objects are presented to consciousness, before they come into being and emerge into the eponymous 'space' that Husserl describes in the title of his lectures. Space became, in his definition, the site of coexisting, emerging 'things' from where he went on to develop the relationship of the human subject within this arrangement. By the end of his lectures Husserl had teased these relationships into a symbiosis of shared propositions that Duchamp seems to adopt in his desolation of 'limbs and organs' in the '*téléphonique*' note or in the challenging modality of the 'Jura-Paris Road'. This is how Husserl describes his restless subjectivity in 1907:

> Let us now think of a moving object, a train-car, and of my Body as placed within. If I were walking beside the train, such that I and the car were moving

> together, then its position relative to my Body would be constant. If I am seated in it and am no longer walking, the outer world remains unchanged in its mode of appearance, and the same flux of images is apprehended as stationary. […] I now have the kinaesthetic circumstances of rest and the apprehension of the car as movement, as still moving, and the surroundings as ever stationary. When I sit down in the car, a change takes place.
>
> (Husserl [1907] 1997: 242)

He continues to develop this theme, in what became a progressive dismissal of the early cautious approach. By comparison his closing remark in the appendix to the 'Thing and Space Lectures' are almost light-hearted: 'But I experience the individual moving object: the moving train-car. I jump aboard: "Everything is moving," "I am stationary." I jump off: the car is moving between stationary or moving things. I run after it: it is stationary' (Husserl [1907] 1997: 341).

The light-hearted nature of Edmund Husserl's observations contrasts with Marcel Duchamp's texts and it is conceivable that Duchamp might not have been aware of Husserl at this point. Neither the French artist nor the German philosopher were particularly well known in France in 1912; nevertheless, something of Husserl's meticulous process may have permeated through the border from Germany to the studios of Paris. This was of course the heyday of the philosopher Henri Bergson (Antliff 1992: 43) and although he does not seem to have encouraged them, he had a group of acolytes within the cubist hierarchy who congregated at the house of Duchamp's brothers at Puteaux in the years before World War I to discuss, among other things, his theories. There is now an influential body of opinion to show how Marcel Duchamp shifted his ground away from conventional cubist objectives. Already suspicious of Duchamp for his heterodox opinions (Henderson 1998: 77) the presiding statesmen of salon cubism would, for a variety of reasons, want to distance themselves from the spatial proclivities of a German philosopher whose country was preparing to invade theirs.

There is, nevertheless, good reason for citing the influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology on Marcel Duchamp. Husserl's precise approach seems to inform the language in Duchamp's text, particularly with relation to the hallucinatory, 'phantom' stage of his exegesis. Duchamp's note alludes to a variety of themes including military adventurism that are away from Husserl's remit, but they submit to a phenomenological order that, in their careful detail, seem to define space, the things in it and subjective embodiment along lines that were adumbrated, between 1905 and 1907, by Husserl. The following extract, however is from Duchamp's 1912 'Jura-Paris Road'. We can see how the note creates a bridge between an earlier concern with symbolist language in the personae of the 'chief of the 5 nudes' and the 'headlight child', and an entirely different set of concerns based on quantity, analysis and incremental change:

> But in the beginning (in the chief of the 5 nudes) it will be very finite in width, thickness (etc.), in order little by little, to become without topographical form in coming close to this ideal straight line which finds its opening towards the infinite in the headlight child.
>
> (Duchamp 1973: 26)

Duchamp's description in the 'Jura-Paris Road' presents things as if experienced for the first time. He envisions the givenness of the road ahead in its most elementary form, presented to consciousness before it can be properly interpreted. He anticipates it, stretching into the 'ideal' straight line between two place names Jura and Paris and establishes that the journey starts out as a topographical expanse implying a spatial recognition and a regional specificity before rendering down progressively to its abstraction in a straight line that ends in its metonymic endpoint: Paris. The ellipsis that is provided in the hyphenated title 'Jura-Paris', eliminates all details of this journey and the subsequent text struggles, unevenly, with a communicable description. Duchamp made four versions, or notes of this experience, ranging between 35 and 300 words, each one at a tangent from the last and this inconsistency suggests the retreat of comprehension, of conscious perception even, in the advance of something inexplicable and powerful.[6]

Duchamp, was reputedly ill on this return journey and something of this hallucinatory text may be attributed to his exaggerated responses to what might have been otherwise a fairly ordinary, if very long and uncomfortable journey by automobile in this pre-war period. We must assume that something transpired on that journey and that Duchamp had difficulty in finding words for it. This bewildering experience is conveyed to his own confused perceptions as the exhausting modalities of the motor journey overpower his abilities to describe them. Much has been made of the strange personages who inhabit these lines of text, the 'headlight child', the 'chief of the 5 nudes', the 'machine with 5 hearts', but what really seems to be singular, original, ground-breaking even, is his attention throughout to minute changes as things gradually appear – as yet indistinct – into the realms of consciousness. Do other philosophers or, for that matter, artists address this state of incoherence at the emergence of conscious perception or at the limits of exhaustion at this time? Perhaps they do, but this claim can be made with considerable assurance in the cases of both Husserl and Duchamp. In the 'Jura-Paris Road' this appears in the retreat from intentionality to immanence with the 'opening towards the infinite', while in Husserl's case this was manifest in his descriptions of jumping on and off railway carriages, while meticulously observing the process and how this would present itself to him.

As described by Duchamp, the journey led to a shared agency, engendered proprioceptively and developed constituently to surmount and overcome the obstructions and competing events that were likely to occur in transit. Such was the efficiency of this operation that these peripheral occurrences would appear as incidentals of context on the outer edge of a deployment, whether experienced by passengers in an automobile or by soldiers advancing over broken ground. The questing 'nudes' that we see below, could take their place as either of these.

> The machine with 5 hearts, the pure child of nickel and platinum will dominate the Jura-Paris road. At one end, the chief of the 5 nudes will lead the 4 other nudes *towards* this Jura-Paris road. At the other end, the radiant child will be the instrument conquering this Jura-Paris road.
>
> (Duchamp 1973: 26)

6. Between 1934 and 1986 the only version of the 'Jura-Paris road' available was to be found in the 'Green Box'. This was translated and published in book form in 1973. Following Duchamp's death, three more versions of this text were discovered by his widow Alexina Duchamp and published by Paul Matisse in 1986.

In overcoming objectives with the unified potential that he alludes to here, Duchamp advances his notes towards a mechanical and military fatalism while embracing, I suggest, the philosophical language developed in oppositional territory.

Military papers

Marcel Duchamp sailed for New York in June 1915. His letters to his friend Walter Pach in America show that he had been secretly planning this journey for six months, probably even further back than that (Duchamp 2000: 33). He might have hoped that in New York he would be beyond the attention of the military authorities as well as being out of range of colleagues, his brothers included, who were placing limits on his creative autonomy and he therefore kept his plans for his departure away from interested parties in France. He explained the secretive nature of his preparations to Pach on 2 April 1915 when he wrote:

> I have told nobody about this plan. Could you please, therefore, reply to these questions on a separate sheet of paper in your letter so that my brothers don't find out until my plans have been finalized. About the war, no important news.
>
> (Duchamp 2000: 34)

Duchamp did not inform his family until it was too late to do anything other than voice their objections. From this time on, he was free to do as he chose. Nevertheless, the influence of the war continued to shadow his thoughts during these early days in America to the extent that he would speculate, in interviews, on how the preparations for war had affected European art and so, presumably, by inference his own practice. Four months after his arrival in 1915, he would say to the *New York Tribune* that: 'Cubism could almost be called a prophet of the war, as Rousseau was of the French Revolution, for the war will produce a severe, direct art' (Caumont and Gough-Cooper 1993: 12th September 1915 unpaginated). In this unblinking appraisal he identifies with a national crisis that threatened to engulf individual suffering, where suffering was on such an enormous scale that individual expressions of grief would be absorbed into one agreed manifestation of distress. This statement evokes the elegiac theme of the *Éloignement* note where Duchamp prescribes his formulaic 'Regulation of regrets' in response to the scattered limbs and organs that even *télépho-nique* communication fail to reconnect. Towards the end of an otherwise confident and untroubled interview he allows a glimpse into a different state of mind that must have surprised his New York readers when he acknowledges that:

> One readily understands this when one realizes the growing hardness of feeling in Europe, one might say the utter callousness with which people are learning to receive the news of the death of those nearest and dearest to them. Before the war the death of a son in a family was received with utter, abject woe, but today it is merely part of a huge universal grief, which hardly seems to concern any one individual.
>
> (Caumont and Gough-Cooper 1993: 12th September 1915 unpaginated)

In spite of his medical clearance and his distance from the fighting, military accountability continued to affect him in America and in 1917 he reported again to a French military assessment board, this time in New York City. He seems to have been cleared again although, from this time, Duchamp became drawn into activities that underscored America's common purpose with France. He went with friends to hear Maréchal Joffre speak in New York in May 1917 and in October he reported for work in a military procurement mission (Duchamp 2000: 52). Duchamp claimed that: 'I too am to be of service to my country.' A statement that is difficult to credit if Duchamp's attitude to service and duty are to be believed. Later, he claimed not to have enjoyed the experience and abruptly abandoned this work and took a ship, in August 1918, to Buenos Aires (Cabanne [1967] 1971: 52); even here, military associations affected his responses and the German-style uniforms of the Argentine soldiers gave him the illusion of being a prisoner of war. Before leaving, he worked on a propaganda film by Leonce Perret entitled *Lafayette! We Come!* playing the part of a wounded French soldier. This simply might have been a bit of fun, perhaps even the chance to earn some easy money; but the knowledge that his brother had been evacuated from the war, suffering from typhoid that he had contracted while treating wounded soldiers in the unsanitary conditions of a field hospital, may well have given Duchamp some cause for thought.

While working for the army, Duchamp created a work with an explicit military provenance. This was the readymade entitled *French Military Paper*

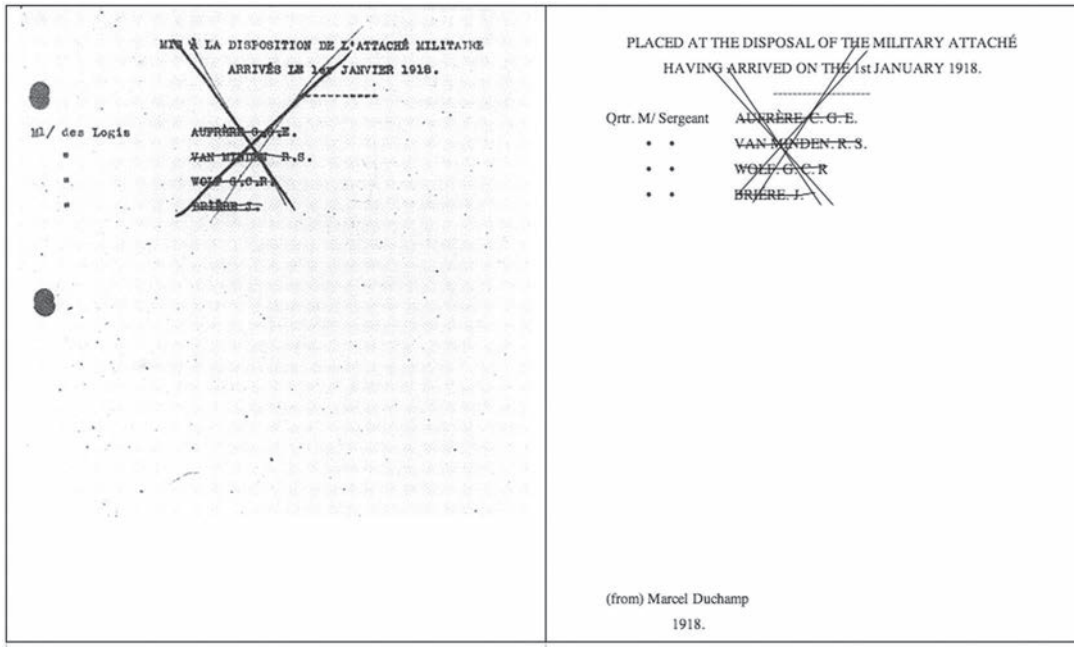


Figure 8: M. Duchamp (1918), French Military Paper. © *Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2006, ADAGP/ Paris. DACS, London. K. Lyons, Typographic version of French Military Paper.*

(1918). The work is illustrated in Schwarz's *catalogue raisonné* where the author notes:

> Duchamp made this list while working as a secretary to a captain in the French Purchasing Commission in New York. Earning $25 a week, Duchamp worked there six months, until a couple of weeks before leaving for Buenos Aires on August 13, 1918.
>
> (Schwarz 1997: 657)

The work comprises one single page of typescript dating from his period of work in the Military Procurement Office and shows a list of army personnel, new arrivals, whom according to the document, have been seconded to the office of the Military Attaché. Each name has been individually typed out in a column and later crossed out, and then deliberately re-crossed out again in a single act of dispassionate accounting. Listed first by rank, these soldiers were senior cavalry NCOs or *maréchal des logis*, on diplomatic assignment and probably reprieved from the fighting in France. Whether they arrived safely is unclear, perhaps the emphatic crossing-out suggests that they did not. Had they done so, the opinion that they would hold of this compatriot – a subordinate with no combat experience in an undemanding job away from regimental duties – is likely to have been trenchantly expressed and may well have influenced Duchamp's sudden decision to move on again. His emphatic statement to Pierre Cabanne of this unpleasant atmosphere may well reflect the attitude of veteran troops to other men who managed to evade the war.

Military preoccupations 1911–45

By the time that Marcel Duchamp left New York in 1918, his preoccupation had informed a list of works of which the *French Military Paper* was the most recent example. Among others that preceded it in this roll-call we see his *Moulin à café* where he uses military slang to link his painting to the despised Puteaux machine gun. He then gave this work, disguised innocuously as an exercise in cubist technique, to his brother, the dutiful cavalry reservist, in 1911. Duchamp's military imagination continues in the four 'Jura-Paris' notes of 1912 where themes of conflict and aggression and of advancing in formation are presented in terms of an invasion. Duchamp's preliminary notes for this journey, which remained unpublished in his life time, display these aggressive military themes quite explicitly.[7] He made his 'Cemetery of Uniforms' between 1913 and 1914 while France was mobilizing for war and in this climate Duchamp's very particular squad of dispirited conscripts, including the redundant *cuirassier*, contributes to the thesis for a military theme based on failure. This paralleled his own protracted appeal against compulsory military service, his objection to which is seen in the first line of the *Éloignement* note.

Such, perhaps minor, interventions contribute to a military thematic that continues into the war period when he was living as an émigré Frenchman and found himself being drawn into activities, occupations even, that would appear to contradict the impression that has been built up around him of an artist who preferred to confront invasion (as well as war, duty, family and social expectation) 'with folded arms'. The final salvos of his toy cannon,

7. For further information on the chronology of the four notes for the 'Jura-Paris road', please see this author's doctoral thesis 'Conscripting the "Jura-Paris road": military themes in the work of Marcel Duchamp', University of Wales, Newport, 2007.

fired to determine the positioning of the 'shots' in the *Large Glass* may well have signalled the closing moves of this military agenda, which seems to finally disappear in its final, cataclysmic, shattering in 1926.

In 2004, Lydie Sarazin-Levassor's account of her brief marriage to Marcel Duchamp was published. The marriage lasted for six months between June 1927 and their divorce in January 1928. In passing she describes Duchamp's enthusiasm for scurrilous, sometimes hurtful word-play. One of these ends with a question that seems to turn his ironic intention back on to himself: '*Lard ou saindoux […] Et pourquoi pas le gros lard militaire?*' The fuller quotation appears at the head of this article and its official translation along with its explanation is included in the first of the endnotes below. These demonstrate again Duchamp's impulse towards military themes, even after his apparent release from service. The references to the French noun *lard*, which shares a homophonic similarity with the French *l'art*, allows him to develop his idea towards *l'art militaire* or the 'art of war'. The phrase *lard où saindoux* incorporates a military slur that was current at the time. Among the range of epithets reserved for NCOs by ordinary ranks in the French army, the term *saindoux* was used to refer to corporals. *Saindoux* means 'lard' but also sounds like *seins* and *doux*, terms that convey the unmilitary associations of softness, lardy-ness and women's breasts in one derogatory expression. Duchamp's impromptu remark should be seen in light of his own military status. At particular points in his career he will have been referred to, if not directly addressed as '*un saindoux*' and so a measure of self-awareness comes with his question.

His illustration for the 1945 cover of the American journal *View* is perhaps the final instance of a military connection. He photographed a wine bottle for his cover image, replacing the wine-label with his *certificat de bonne conduit*, the call-up papers (name and rank included) that he would present to the military authorities in Paris and New York in the 1914–18 period. Although superfluous in 1945, the *certificat* binds him into a connection with the French army that even now he seems at pains to want to dispel. This briefly lengthens the disappearing shadow of his military preoccupation, but by this time Marcel Duchamp's interest was shifting to a new project. In it the *Large Glass* is re-contextualized into his final statement, the extraordinary *Étant Donné*. Finally the references to the military environment that preoccupied him for forty years are excised from his vocabulary.

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Kieran Lyons' PhD thesis was awarded in August 2007. The research topic considered the implications of militarism in France on Marcel Duchamp in the ten years between 1905 – 1915. He has delivered papers and essays on this and related subjects since 2000, perhaps most significantly with the online publication in 'Tate Papers'.[7] Recently, a monograph on his installation work made in New Zealand in 1976 has appeared in 'Reading Room'.[7] Between 1976 and 2009 he has worked in Britain as a performance and installation artist and since the PhD has re-engaged with a different practice producing precise technical drawings, in digital and mechanical form where the rapidly drawn cancelling marks made by ticket inspectors, on his train-tickets, are transferred into outsized statements in his studio - these owe their existence to the research towards his PhD and hope to reflect the influence of its subject.

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