

DESIGNER AS THE AUTHOR AFTER DUCHAMP

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ABSTRACT

The increasing merge of art and design provides new concepts and methods for designers. This article is going to discuss the influence of Dada in the works of contemporary industrial designers with reference to Marcel Duchamp's work. Having suggested the *Fountain* (1917) and the *Bottle Rack* as art pieces, Duchamp, introduced the concept of the "ready-made". In art history, this revolutionary gesture lends freedom to artists because it created "art in general" as opposed to specific genres such as sculpture, painting, etc. (De Duve, 1996; West, 2004). This conceptual breaking point is the main motivation behind this study of ready-mades in design.

To explore the Duchampien influence in industrial design, certain industrial designers contributed to a questionnaire with both multiple choice and short essay questions. Consequently, two industrial designers were interviewed to engage in their process. All of the designers in the group have indicated that they have been using methods of art in their design practice since graduation. In this regard, this is a limited study to grasp a starting point to understand *which peculiar methods of modern art and for which reasons these designers use in their practice.*

Keywords: Dada, Duchamp, ready-made, art in industrial design

1 INTRODUCTION

The effect of art on design is not only an influence. Designers who study the methods of art consciously borrow artistic methods not only for inspiration but also for content. The intertwined relationship of art and design has been subject to research to understand how methods and concepts of art and design interact and overlap. The term "designart" was coined by Coles (2005) to address the blurry field between contemporary art and design: covering a wide range of artists who use design methods and designers who use artistic strategies; from Paul Rand to Andrea Zittel.

This research is about designers who are influenced from art in their design practice. The article is not going to discuss whether or not art is influential on design but it will discuss "in what way" ready-mades as an artistic concept are transformed to design around two questions: Are there different methods of using the same concept of art? Is borrowing concepts from art only styling or an ontological transformation? The answers to these questions might illuminate a broader third question: And how are concepts transformed while they are brought into the design realm?

Dada's influence on art and design is the most long-lasting one among all art movements (Heller, 2006). According to Heller (2006): "*The Twentieth Century's most famous anarchic art movement still exerts a huge- some would say- influence on mainstream art and design.*" The abundance of designers who use ready-mades maybe more than any other technique of modern art triggered the urge to study this specific and layered subject.

2 READY-MADE AS A CONCEPT IN ART HISTORY

The prominent Dada theorists, Breton and Eluard (1938) define ready-made as "*an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist*" (Breton et al., 1938: 23). The concept of ready-made was introduced for the first time by Dada artist Marcel Duchamp (1915) by '*Bottle Rack*' (1915), although the term 'ready-made' has been synonymous with the '*Fountain*' (1917). Another early ready-made '*In Advance of the Broken Arm*' (1915) is a good example that defines the nature of the **encounter of the artist with an object** that has the potential to be a ready-made.

'In Advance of the Broken Arm' is one of the first pieces Duchamp made when he moved to New York from Paris during the First World War. The piece is made after a snow shovel: an item Duchamp saw for the first time in his life in New York. A Snow shovel brought into his studio was hung up on the wall by the artist,

as ready-made.

The concept of ready-made became revolutionary and then popular via *'Fountain'* (1917). The fountain-when it was only a urinal- was submitted to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition with a pseudo signature: R. Mutt. The piece was not exhibited after discussions of whether it was art or not. The original piece is lost. The oldest document is a Stieglitz photograph taken right after the exhibition. Duchamp's use of anonymous industrial objects continued along his entire career.

The introduction of the ready-made made a great impact in modern art. Instead of making a physical art work and exhibiting it on a pedestal, an industrially manufactured urinal was submitted to an exhibition as art. This gesture created an inexhaustible question: "what is art?" by omitting the art work and emphasising the process.

Duchamp replaced the art object with a "ready-made" to show that anything can be art, **providing certain conditions**. According to De Duve (1996), Duchamp had a set of rules for an object to become a ready-made. Thus, 'anything' can be art if it fulfils these conditions. These conditions are important for this study to understand the similarities and differences of the nature of ready-mades in design, when compared to art. According to De Duve (1996) the most important step is constructing a sentence such as "Here is..." or "This is..." This is named as the "enunciative paradigm" (Foucault, 1972). Enunciative paradigm is existential. It opens everything to discussion through language. Transforming art from the ostensive paradigm to the enunciative or discursive paradigm detached the art object from its exchange value and created new values: appreciation of the conceptual and the abstract. In other words, Duchamp traded the physicality object with a linguistic argument which expanded the viability of cultural production and its author (De Duve, 1996). The condition of a "ready-made" mentioned by De Duve (1996) has four steps. These four steps define a cultural construct. Thus, "ready-mades" are inter-relational and they are available everywhere as long as there is a referent, an enunciator, audience and an institution. In other words, ready-made succeeded because it became a word of mouth, a myth (Barthes, 1957). Thus, it can be said that ready-made is an art making system. This argument is going to be used to see how designers use this system for an ontological change.

3 THE ONTOLOGICAL INFLUENCE OF READY-MADES IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

To understand the function of the influence of art on design, a questionnaire and a set of interviews were devised. The research questions were asked to practitioner designers rather than analyzing how ready-made was historically used in design only from texts.

The questionnaire and interviews were made in the light of the daily observations of the researcher. These include increasing use of ready-mades by design students, as to claim 'anything' as design, the researcher's observations of her own friends' practice, the increasing number of articles on the conceptual interaction of art and design and finally, Duchamp's being frequently mentioned as the founding father of the concepts and ideas. It is widely known by designers that Dada is a breaking point in art in the 20th century. The researcher had the impression that by studying this breaking point, some designers use the invention of the ready-made progressively in design for conceptual reasons.

The questionnaires were answered by 11 designers. All of these designers were educated as industrial designers from three different countries. They were contacted through a web of personal relations. The designers were either reached by e-mail or they were handed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to 12 designers. Only one of them said that he was not an appropriate designer for this research. After having evaluated the questionnaire, two designers were interviewed. These designers were chosen according to the detailed short essays that they have written in the questionnaire. These short essays were quite provocative and made the researcher want to hear more from them.

All of the designers indicated that they were exposed to a variety of art history courses during their education, from cave paintings to 21st century art. Some designers listed specific courses such as "Sculpture and Metaphor", "Art and Design in Society" and "American Art since 1945".

First of all, the designers were asked to indicate which modern art movement they think was the most influential on design. Among choices, painterly movements such as Realism, Expressionism and Impressionism were not listed. Only movements in relation to objects were listed: Cubism, Constructivism, Dada and Futurism. 7 designers indicated that the most influential movement was Dada.

In the second question designers were asked to indicate which movement of modern art was the most influential in “their” design practice. 8 designers indicated that Dada is the most influential modern art movement in their practice. This has affirmed that the sample group is a group of designers whose work is influenced majorly by dada. 5 designers out of the mentioned 8 designers said that they were using found objects the most. The other 3 said that appropriation was their major method. 5 designers out of the mentioned 8 designers placed ready-made as their second frequently used method.

5 designers among the mentioned 8 designers said that they were influenced from dada because of its philosophy: its view of the world. None of the 11 designers said that they were primarily influenced by art in means of form. **In the light of this data, it can be said that the designers are influenced from Dada existentially and ontologically.**

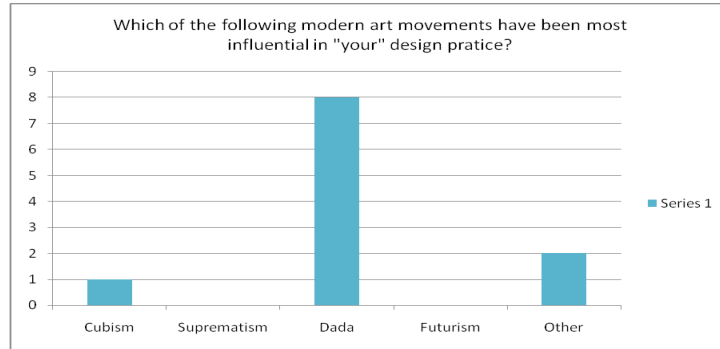


Figure 2. Question: Which of the following art movements have been most influential in “ your” design practice?

8 designers have consistently said that they were influenced by Dada the most and that they use found objects the most in their work and that they are influenced from the Dadaist philosophy. Taking the correlation of these 8 designers answers to four consecutive questions, it can be said that there is a conscious influence not only a formal one. For this reason, it can be said that Dadaist critique has an ontological influence on these particular set of designers’ work. Thus, critical content can be expected in these designers’ works.

According to Designer BY: *“The relationship between art and product design is beyond inspiration. Product design can only survive if it revisits its understanding ‘to meet the criteria of usefulness’...The critical distance that needs to be put between the designer and the final product is formed by accepting that products are over-rationalized representations of who we are.”* (Yancatarol, 2008). This resonates in line with a young designer once saying Steven Heller that he is going to do the Dada and “make a mess on the page”. In Heller’s words *“For him, historical Dada was a useful model of how to be acceptable anarchic and safely ironic.”*

4 DADA INFLUENCES AS A METHOD IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN



Table 06. (a) “Unpredictable Product Spoilation”, a project by designer BY (2007). (b). The Process of “UPS”

After the questionnaire two designers were interviewed about why and how they use ready-mades. Table 06, shows a project called UPS designed by one of the interviewees BY. In this project, a pair of Converse shoes were mailed in a box with wet painted balls. When the Converse shoes are received they are stamped and transformed into another product during the voyage. Thus, the memory of the trip is mapped on the shoes

through chance operation. Figure 07 is drawn by the designer to systemize this experiment. This system called UPS (Unpredictable Product Spoilation) transforms “ready-mades” to “unpredictable products”. The designer processes a ready-made with another material which she names “accident catalyst”. The process is conceptualized as a chemical reaction which changes the genes of the given product, not only its form. Thus, how read-mades are transformed into design by triggering concepts like “unpredictable products” and “accidents catalyst”.

Designer BY (2008) indicates that for her, **the product is the entire process**. Thus, her products are *performative* in the sense that the experience of the product is dispersed in the entire process. It is crucial to notice that BY takes art beyond inspiration as she indicated in the questionnaire. She looks at art ontologically, makes a method of her own out of it and redefines her design practice.

According to designer BY (2008), the major reason for using ready-mades is her interest in *displacement*. Thus, displacement refers to a dialogue with existing products which have been already coded by users. This matches with the nature of the “ready-made” in art. By displacement BY (2008) means that she dislocates “*the conventional meaning and function of a product to show what other meanings and capacities are embedded in the objects.*” Thus, she looks at art through the lenses of a designer. In other words, she first looks at design and her designerly concerns; then she looks at art to borrow methods, keeping in mind that those concepts are going to be incorporated back to the design realm.

According to BY, found objects and ready-mades have two specific functions in her design. She uses found objects “*as a result of an unexpected encounter*”: “*If an object triggers an insight, I know that it has a place in my design. I start to explore the potential of that object immediately and I feel an urge to make something with it. It is a feeling.*” While she uses found objects intuitively, she uses read-mades methodically as also indicated in Table 06: for “displacement”: “*Ready-mades are familiar objects. They have fixed meanings. They signify our conventional object world. Thus, they have potential to be intervened.*”

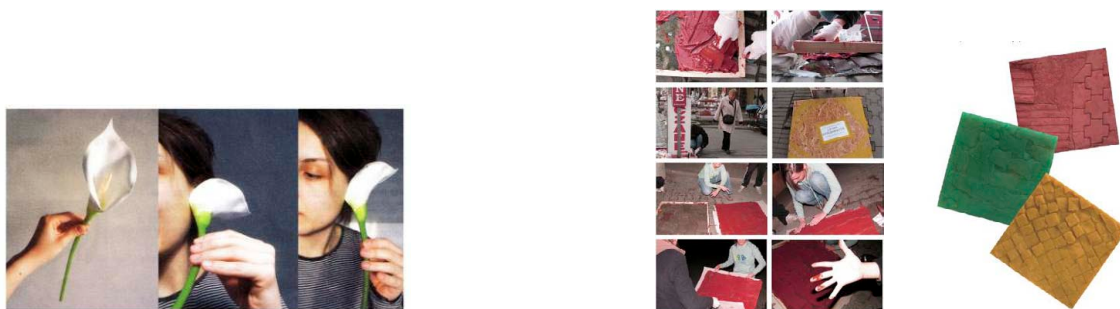


Table 08. (a) Flower Phone by designer EK, 2002. (b) Traces by designer EK, 2007.

Designer EK, indicates two reasons for using ready-mades. The first one is because she finds using ready-mades efficient for communication with the user: “*If an already existing form matches with my idea, I feel free to use it. I don't feel obliged to look for a form from scratch. It's more exciting to bring forward new ideas with existing form typologies.*” During her process, EK starts with an idea and *edits* many objects around her to choose the appropriate one, recalling the definition of the ready-made by Breton and Eluard above: “*an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist*” (Breton et al., 1938: 23). This can be regarded as her own method of using ready-mades. While designer BY uses ready-mades to subvert conventional meaning, EK uses the advantages of conventional meaning so that her designs can be perceived easily. Similar to BY, EK underlines the importance of the process rather than the product. In “Traces” (Table 09) EK made a plastic carpet by making a mould of the pavement of her street. According to the designer, the mould making process which takes place on the street is as important as the final product: “*it is actually not possible to make a mould of the pavement indeed and that a flower, as a nostalgic form, is not meant to be a phone.*” (EK, 2008).

5 CONCLUSION

The data driven from the questionnaire and the interviews shows how some designers borrow methods from art. It can be argued that the some designers were influenced from the Duchampien gesture almost as

deeply as artists. In other words, ready-mades might have created a paradigm change for designers just like it created the paradigm of “art in general”. This might also illuminate why their design process is process oriented and conceptual.

The influence of Dada on design is broader than what is discussed in this article. However, the processes of the two interviewed designers (who were trained at different schools and have never met before) shows some signs that the influence of Dada dematerialized (Lippard, 1997; Frascara, 2001) product design and created a performative process. This hypothesis can be expanded in further research by analyzing more design work and talking to more designers so that it can explain some roots of conceptualism in design in the light of the Duchampien oeuvre.

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