

From the Referential to the Relational: Duchamp and Wittgensteinian Family Resemblance

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Abstract This essay identifies and discusses certain affinities between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Duchamp's artistic work. While acknowledging the great differences between the one and the other, it cannot fail to strike one that the two take similar attitudes on certain issues concerning the way they look at mathematics and numbers, the importance given to the relational over the referential, and the peculiar use made of the notion of context.

Keywords Duchamp. Wittgenstein. Family Resemblance. Context. Relation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Context and Contact. – 3 All in the Family.



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1 Introduction

In 1913, Marcel Duchamp cut a length of white thread exactly one metre long, stretched it at a distance of one metre above a rectangular canvas painted Prussian blue, and let it fall. He did the same thing with two more threads, each one to fall onto a separate canvas, and then to be glued down with varnish in whatever shape it had assumed [fig. 1]. Calling the piece *Three Standard Stoppages* (*Trois Stoppages Etalon*), Duchamp was amused to note that the supposedly ‘fixed’ metre assumed three slightly different shapes when it fell to the ground (see Cabanne 1968, 46-7). Duchamp called it “canned meter” or “canned chance”: “pure chance” he tells Pierre Cabanne, “interested me as a way of going against logical reality”. Or, to give this thread the twist we find in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*:

There is *one* thing of which one can state neither that it is 1 meter long, nor that it is not 1 meter long, and that is the standard meter in Paris. — But this is, of course, not to ascribe any remarkable property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the game of measuring with a meter-rule. (PI, I, § 55)

In later life, Duchamp remarked that *Three Standard Stoppages* was his most important work:

That was really when I tapped the mainspring of my future. In itself it was not an important work of art, but for me it opened the way—the way to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art [...] For me the Three Stoppages was a first gesture liberating me from the past. (Kuh 1962, 81)

The three glued threads were permanently affixed to glass plate strips, which served as imprints for the preparation of three wood templates. The entire assembly was then enclosed in a wooden croquet box [fig. 2], and it is in the context of this box that most viewers know the work. What Duchamp liked is that his curved threads questioned the authority of *metre* as a standard unit of measure. The work reminds us, as Francis Naumann notes, that metre is itself “a unit of length generated through approximation: the straightening out, as it were, of a curved meridian” (Naumann 1989, 30). Duchamp thus parodies our faith in scientific authority, our trust in causality.

At around the same time that Duchamp was playing with “canned chance”, Wittgenstein, who was serving in the Austrian army on the Eastern Front during World War I, wrote in his notebook:

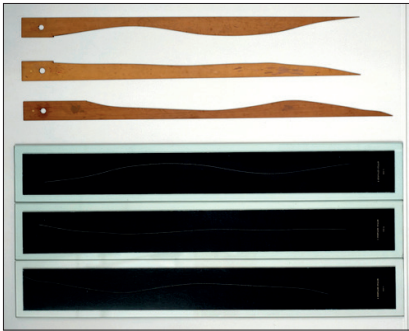


Figure 1 Marcel Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages*, 1913-14. Wood, thread, paint, canvas, and glass, dimensions, variable. Museum of Modern Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier. Photo: Museum of Modern Art

Figure 2 Marcel Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages*, 1913-14. Complex construction of multiple parts inside wood box, 129.2 x 28 x 23 cm. Museum of Modern Art; Bequest of Catharine S. Dreier. Photo: Museum of Modern Art

In essence, the whole modern conception of the world is based on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are explanations of natural phenomena.

So they stop short at the “laws of nature” treating them as something untouchable, just as their ancestors did with God and Fate. And in fact both are right and both are wrong. The Ancients were actually clearer, in that they acknowledged a clear-cut limit, while with the new system, it is supposed to look as if everything can be explained. (PN, 6.5.1916, 171)

In slightly different form, these lines reappear in the 1922 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, expressing Wittgenstein's repeated caution that the “so-called laws of nature” are not to be trusted as explanations of natural phenomena (TLP, Prop. 6.371). And in the lectures delivered at Cambridge between 1930-32 – lectures that first introduce many of the key issues taken up in the *Philosophical Investigations* – we find an uncanny echo of the experiment behind *The Three Standard Stoppages*:

What does it mean to hold that there are *a priori* concepts? If we pull a piece of cotton very tight, then to say that it is straight is to refer to what is manifest to our senses [...] But we know perfectly well that if we look through a magnifying glass we shall see that what was apparently straight actually is not so. (WLC, 77-8)

Then again the “uncanny” echo may not be so surprising. For although Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) could hardly have been more different – indeed oppositional – in their

tastes, habits, and values¹ – they shared a particular interest in mathematics as a science with ‘poetic’ possibilities. The two came of age at the moment in history when geometry, traditionally the dominant branch of mathematics, was giving way to a new understanding of *number*. As Andrea K. Henderson has argued in an important essay on numerical abstraction in Victorian literature, this was the period when logicians first concerned themselves with the seemingly simple reality that, while “7 inches is a concrete reality, 7-ness is not” (Henderson 2024). The shift was from a world in which mathematics was still grounded in spatial intuitions (geometry) to one that turned to the temporal, mathematics concerning itself with sets of objects to be enumerated.

What was enumerated, moreover, was not things in themselves but the differences between them. Thus mathematicians came to conceive their work not as a referential science, but as a science of *relationships*.²

Readers of the *Philosophical Investigations* will recognise this view of *relatedness* as central to Wittgenstein’s own thinking. We routinely refer, he remarks early in the *Investigations*, to 5 apples or 3 slabs, but how do we define the number two?

The definition of the number two, “That is called ‘two’”—pointing to two nuts—is perfectly exact.—But how can the number two be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn’t know *what* it is that one wants to call “two”; he will suppose that “two” is the name given to *this* group of nuts!—He *may* suppose this; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake: when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might take it to be the name of a number. (PI, I, § 28)

Perhaps someone will say “two” can be ostensively defined only in *this* way: “This *number* is called ‘two’”. For the word “number” here shows what *place* in language, in grammar, we assign to the word. But this means that the word “number” must be explained before that ostensive definition can be understood.

Whether the word “number” is necessary in an ostensive definition of “two” depends on whether without this word the other person takes the definition otherwise than I wish. And that will

¹ See my “Introduction” to PN, *passim*.

² Cf. the logician William Stanley Jevons (1874), as cited by Henderson 2024: “Number is but another name for diversity. Exact identity is unity, and with difference arises plurality”.

depend on the circumstances under which it is given, and on the person I give it to.

And how he “takes” the explanation shows itself in how he uses the word explained. (PI; I, § 29)

Indeed, it follows, numbers can be understood only in relation to one another. Seven is one more than six and one less than eight of whatever the items in question. Or again, seven is two times three plus one. And further (PI, I, § 552-3), the meaning of a given number will also depend on context:

What if I were to ask: does it become evident, while we are uttering the sentences “This rod is 1 metre long” and “Here is 1 soldier”, that we mean different things by “1”, that “1” has different meanings?—It does not become evident at all. —Say, for example, such a sentence as “1 metre is occupied by 1 soldier, and so 2 metres are occupied by 2 soldiers.” Asked, “Do you mean the same by both ‘ones’?” one would perhaps answer, “Of course I mean the same: *one!*” [Perhaps raising one finger.] (PI, I, § 552)

Now has “1” a different meaning when it stands for a measure and when it stands for a number? If the question is framed in *this* way, one will answer affirmatively. (PI, I, § 553)

Thus a given number – say, 3 – as in Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages* takes on different meanings according to its context and use.

The profound shift from the *referential* to the *relational* is at the core of one of the concepts central to the *Philosophical Investigations*: namely, *family resemblance*:

Consider, for example, the activities that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on. What is common to them all? [...] if you look at them, you won’t see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. [...] Look, for example, at board-games with their various affinities. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. [...] Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball-games, there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck, and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis.

**Figure 3**

Marcel Duchamp. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23. Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels, with five glass strips, aluminum foil, and a wood and steel frame, 109 1/4 × 69 1/4 inches (277.5 × 175.9 cm). © ARS, NY. Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier, 1952. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo: The Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a *complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing*: similarities in the large and in the small. (PI, I, § 66)

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “*family resemblances*”; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on—overlap and criss-cross in the same way.— And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.

And likewise the kinds of number, for example, form a family... we extend our concept of number, as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread resides not in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the *overlapping of many fibres*. (PI, I, § 67, emphasis added)

This account of family resemblances is nowhere better exemplified than in the world of Duchampian figuration, especially in the famous *Large Glass*, otherwise known as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même)* [fig. 3]. There is, in this “delay” in glass, as Duchamp playfully called it, only one bride: the enigmatic tube work hanging from the “Milky Way” in the upper half of the *Glass*, but in the lower half, there are *seven* conelike shapes, known as the Sieves or Parasols, *three* Oculist Witnesses (circular diagrams used by oculists to test people’s eyesight), *three* roller-drums that support the Chocolate Grinder, which stands on a circular platform, supported by *three* Louis XV-style legs, and – most prominently of all – the figures called *Nine Malic Moulds*

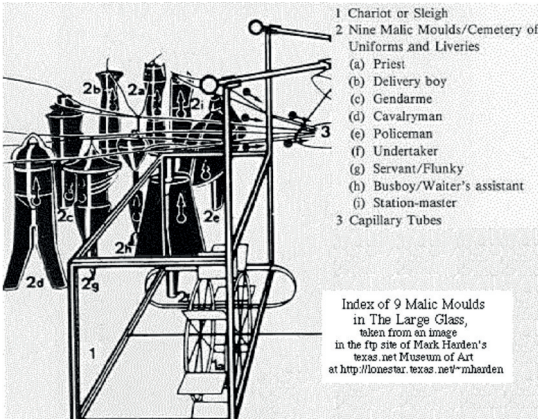
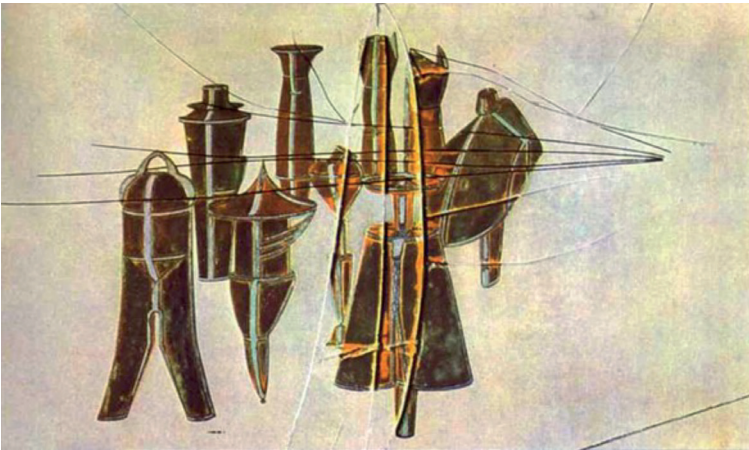


Figure 4
Nine Malic Molds. 1914-15.
 64 × 102 cm. Oil, lead wire, lead foil on glass between two glass plates.
 Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena (CA)

Figure 5
Index of 9 Malic Molds.
 Taken from an image in the ftp site of Mark Harden's Museum of art

at the left centre-rear of the *Glass*. These are the “bachelors” of the title [figs 4]; the group was also known as ‘the Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries’ or, because of the paint used, ‘red fellows’. Here lead wire is used to ‘draw’ the forms, which are painted on glass, sealed with lead foil, and presumably, so Duchamp remarks in his notes, filled with “gaz d’éclairage” (illuminating gas) (Sanouillet, Peterson 1975, 51).

Glass proved to be just the right medium for Duchamp’s spatial structures. In a note about the *Large Glass*’s composition, he wrote:

Make a painting on glass so that it has neither front nor back; neither top, nor bottom. (to serve probably as a *three-dimensional physical medium in a 4-dimensional perspective*.) (Duchamp 1983, 67)

Linda Henderson, in her important study of the scientific sources, adds:

Glass allowed Duchamp to suspend the Bride and her Top Inscription in an indefinite space without clear orientation and without the earthbound quality of the Bachelors below. (Henderson 1998, 81)

The Nine Malic Moulds are remarkable for their equivocal sameness and difference. Made from the same materials in the same way and grouped together, they are a clear-cut unit, a 'family'. Further, all nine 'Moulds' are semi-abstract forms, suggestive without any clear designation, whether of gender, age, or physical appearance. But there are also specifications. In a diagram of the components of the *Large Glass* [fig. 5], Duchamp playfully ascribes the following names to the Nine Malic Moulds (going from left to right): Priest, Delivery Boy, Gendarme, Curassier (cavalryman), Policeman, Undertaker, Flunky (liveried servant), Busboy, Stationmaster. This catalogue is designedly absurd, none of the 'moulds' resembling their given titles. The first on the left, for example, exhibits two legs in trousers, perhaps with a sleeveless vest on top, but the figure also looks like a dress designer's dummy. In either case, no. 1 is far from priestly. Gendarme (no. 3) and Policeman (no. 5) are synonymous characters, but Duchamp's two figures do not look alike: no. 3 has a lantern shape, no. 5 a flag or trophy, whereas no. 4, the Curassier, resembles a bowling pin. Not only do the names fail to define the forms in question; the designations are in no way parallel or in any sort of rational sequence: "Priest" (no. 1) is a vocation: priests may serve in various professions. "Flunky" (no. 7) is a derogatory social designation rather than a profession, and the Curassier (no. 4) has no military colleagues. As for employment status, how does Undertaker (no. 6) relate to Stationmaster (no. 9)?

It is all very arbitrary and yet the group has certain common characteristics; all are 'malic' - male-ish - rather than fully male, which allows Duchamp to create figures like Undertaker (no. 6) and Busboy (no. 8) which could be said to be wearing dresses. None have faces or arms and hands, giving them the look of machine parts or bullets. Further, as Duchamp explains it, "Each of the [...] malic forms is *built* above and below a common horizontal plane, the plane of sex cutting them at the pnt. of sex" (Sanouillet, Peterson 1975, 51). This remark must be taken as tongue-in-cheek because in fact we see no such line of demarcation in the *Large Glass* itself. Rather, the big 'cut' is between the Bride panel and the Bachelors panel, the nine Bachelors being unable to reach the tubing, much less the Milky Way of the Bride up above them. Their family status is thus assured, each figure depending somehow on the others for

completion. One malic mould would be nothing at all; nine make a significant grouping.

When Duchamp later reproduces *Nine Malic Moulds* in miniature for their appearances in his *boîtes en valise*, we recognise them as if they are old friends. Their identity depends upon number as well as form: 9 is 3 x 3 and there are, as I mentioned above, 3 Occulist Witnesses, three Parasols, and three Wheels of the Chocolate Grinder's drum. In astrology, 9 is associated with Mars, the planet of ambition, passion, and aggression, the irony here being that the Malic Moulds are not aggressive or passionate at all; indeed, they are curiously passive. The nine are closer to the Tarot pack of cards, in which the number 9 is that of the Hermit. Since the 'uniforms or hollow liveries' in this 'cemetery' have no arms or hands to touch with, they can only 'hold' the illuminating gas up to the 'planes of flow' above them.

However we interpret Duchamp's composition, the *Nine Malic Moulds* are a perfect example of Wittgensteinian family resemblances. And, as in the case of Wittgenstein, the notion of these resemblances allows Duchamp to play with the concept of *difference* rather than with the similarity between items or with the features of a single isolated work like a geometric figure. A single liquid poured into a number of identical moulds will exhibit minute but significant variations. And even identical twins, Duchamp reminds us, are not entirely alike, thus echoing Wittgenstein's query in the *Investigations* (PI, § 215): "But isn't the same at least *the same*?" "Then are two things the same when they are what *one* thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?"

2 Context and Contact

The answer to these pressing questions, as both Wittgenstein and Duchamp understood, had to do with context. Consider Wittgenstein's discussion of the way we use the colour word blue:

"Is this blue the same as the blue over there? Do you see any difference?"—

You are mixing paints and you say, "It's hard to get the blue of this sky.

"It's turning fine, you can already see blue sky again."

"Note how different these two blues look."

"Do you see the blue book over there? Bring it here."

"This blue light means..."

"What's this blue called?— Is it 'indigo'?" (PI, I, § 33)

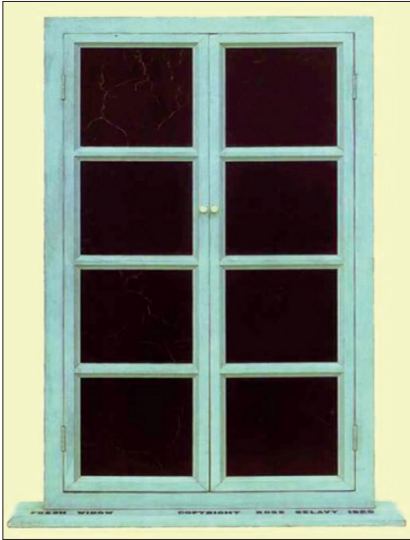
And note that these shades of meaning are merely variations at the *denotative* level; if we added the connotations of blue, as in “Am I blue?” or “He’s a blue-blood”, the list would be much longer. What Wittgenstein is trying to show us is that a single word may have so many possible meanings that we must contextualise and delimit our words as fully as possible. “The meaning of a word is its use in the language” (PI, I, § 43).

The poet, in this scheme of things, is one who understands that the same is never *the same*, and that hence every word, every morpheme and phoneme, and every rhythmic form chosen by the poet makes a difference. To be a poet or artist, in other words, is to draw on the verbal or visual pool we all share but to *choose* one’s words and phrases with an eye to unexpected relationships – verbal, visual, sonic – that create a new construct and context – relationships that create what Duchamp termed *inframince* (infrathin) possibilities (see Perloff 2022, esp. ch. 1). When Wittgenstein famously declared that “*Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten*” (“Philosophy should actually be written only as a form of poetry”) (CV, 28), what he means, I think, is that it is poetry that makes us aware of what language can do and what a difference a single word or phoneme or number can make. Accordingly, the attentive reader must be attuned to difference. Wittgenstein once remarked:

Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is on showing that things which look the same are really different. (Drury 1978, 171)

For Duchamp, difference became the basis of the readymade, with its astonishing visual puns. The “assisted readymade” *Fresh Widow* [fig. 6], for example, is a miniature french window, its frame painted an ugly blue-green like that of beach furniture, and its windows’ eight glass panes covered with sheets of black leather. By erasing a single letter, **n**, from each word in “french window” the object becomes a *Fresh Widow* – perhaps a recent widow or war widow, but also ‘fresh’ in the sense of bold, not easy to repress or squelch. What is this widow thinking? We do not know because the leather panes are impenetrable: we cannot see what is behind them. Then, too, the window is closed, and yet those little knobs on the wood ‘open’ the door, suggesting that perhaps one could see inside!³

³ There is the further joke that no two *Fresh Widows* are quite the same: the leather varies. In the version found at the Chicago Art Institute, there are the outlines of breasts on some of the black leather panes, and so on.

**Figure 6**

Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*. 1920.
 Miniature window: wood painted blue
 and eight rectangles of polished leather.
 77.5 × 45 cm on a wooden board,
 1.9 × 63.3 × 10.2 cm. Museum of Modern Art;
 Bequest of Catharine S. Dreier

Not comparison or generalisation but difference: this, as both Duchamp and Wittgenstein foresaw, from their very different perspectives, would be what is required in the age of social media, where “our craving for generality”, “our tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term” (BB, 17), dominate the scene. The emphasis on the *infrathin* helps us to look more exactly at what is before us; it allows us to recontextualise the *ordinary*, the everyday. And here again Wittgenstein and Duchamp see eye to eye.

3 All in the Family

When philosophers use a word — “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition/sentence”, “name”—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home?—

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (PI, I, § 116)

And in line with this distinction:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something —because it is always before one’s eyes.) (PI, I, § 129)

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language. [...] Rather, the language games stand there as *objects of comparison which*, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. (PI, I, § 130)

Again, Wittgenstein might be describing the avant-garde readymades of the Marcel Duchamp he never knew – those ordinary objects brought back, so to speak, from their metaphysical to their everyday use, and the language games in which these objects participate.

The readymades – *Bottle Dryer, Bicycle Wheel, Dog Comb, Tzanck Check*, and of course the famous urinal called *Fountain* [fig. 7] – are often characterised as arbitrarily selected objects regarded as works of ‘art’ because Duchamp declared that they were.⁴ But the fact is that the readymades exhibit strong family resemblances: all refer to manmade industrial products and all relate somehow to the erotic: think of the bicycle wheel with the rod of the single wheel inside the hole in the stool beneath it.

When I teach a class on Duchamp and hold up, say, a sock as potential readymade, the students immediately and intuitively insist that “no, that’s not a readymade!”. At least not one that belongs to the Duchamp family.

Revealing family resemblance often means taking the object in question out of its actual context and putting it in a new one. Consider Duchamp’s first American readymade *In Advance of the Broken Arm* [fig. 8], a snow shovel, with a flat, galvanised iron blade and a wooden handle, which Duchamp bought in a hardware store on Columbus Ave in New York in 1915. As Calvin Tomkins notes:

There were thousands just like it in hardware stores all over America, stacked up in advance of the winter storms, or, as Duchamp would say in the title that he inscribed on the metal reinforcing plate across the business end, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. Why did he choose this particular item? He [...] had never seen a snow shovel before, he explained some years later—*they did not make such things in France*. [...] Duchamp, after taking it home and signing it “[from] Marcel Duchamp 1915” (to show that it was not ‘by’ but simply ‘from’ the artist), tied a wire to the handle and hung it from the ceiling” (Tomkins 2014, 157-8, italics added)

⁴ Perhaps the most authoritative case for this position is that of Thierry de Duve in his many seminal studies, culminating in de Duve 2023.



Figure 7 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*. 1917/1964. Third version, replicated under the direction of the artist in 1964 by the Galerie Schwarz, Milan. Glazed ceramic, 63 x 48 x 35 cm. AM1986295. © ARS, NY. Photo: Philippe Migeat / Christian Bahier. Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Figure 8 Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. 1964. Fourth version, after lost original of November 1915. Wood and galvanized-iron snow shovel, 52" (132 cm) high. Gift of The Jerry and Emily Spiegel Family Foundation. (690.2006.vw3). © ARS, NY. The Museum of Modern Art. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Describing his newest readymade in a letter to his sister Suzanne, Duchamp remarked: "Don't try too hard to understand it in the Romantic or Impressionistic or Cubist sense—that has nothing to do with it" (cited in Tomkins 2014, 157).

No doubt the idea of shovel made to remove the snow (and possibly break the arm of the shoveller) was one that Duchamp, newly arrived from France in 1915, found intriguing, and its family resemblance to bottle dryer, urinal, or Chocolate Grinder, must have pleased him. But as in *Fountain*, there is also the parodying of the original context for the object in question. Right about the time, he made *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, Duchamp was organising the Salon of the Independents, held in New York in 1917, on the eve of World War I. This was the famous exhibition where anyone could submit up to two art works for the fee of \$ 6 plus a membership fee of \$ 1. One of the paintings shown was Henrik Hillblom's *The Making of an American* (fig. 9), which, as it happens, has recently been advertised on E-Bay on a site called Fantasia Antiques. In the ad, the painting was described as follows:

This wonderful oil on canvas painting is ca 1910 and was painted during the first world war. It shows a standing liberty figure, a man, a woman, baby, child, eagle and cornucopia and much more. Note the patriotic influence of Impressionist Childe Hassam [also in the Independents Exhibition], one of Hillblom's compatriots



Figure 7
Henrik Hillblom,
The Making of an American. 1910 c.
Private Collection

at The Old Lyme Colony who also painted in the patriotic impressionist style.

This painting measures 30”H x 24”W. The colors are marvelous. It has been brought back to its original vibrancy by Page Conservation in Washington DC, restores for the National Gallery of Art. [...] It is a real treasure.⁵

And the website copy goes on to tell us about Henrik Hillblom (1863-1948), who was born in Sweden and studied in Paris with Benjamin Constant and Jules Lefebvre. Hillblom

was a member of the Old Lyme Colony School of Artists, gaining its name due to the large number of painters then living in Old Lyme, Connecticut, which became the first major art colony in America to encourage Impressionism. Old Lyme was accessible to its New York City-based painters by excellent rail service.

Duchamp would have relished this delicious description of the Old Lyme School, especially the misdating of this “World War I” painting as belonging to 1910! The tradition of *The Making of an American* is that of Edwin Markham’s classically sentimental American poem, *The Man with a Hoe* (1899), which begins:

⁵ <http://www.fantasia-antiques.com/Fantasia/hillblom.html/> [URL available until July 2008].

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
 Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground
 The emptiness of ages in his face
 And on his back the burden of the world. (Markham 1899)

The painting of the famed Liberty figure – a secular goddess – silhouetted against the American flag, proffering a huge shovel to the eager man, who is flanked on one side by a young boy, no doubt his son, and on the other by his wife, holding a baby in her shawl, is the quintessential patriotic image of the welcoming of immigrants to the American soil, where a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables (lower right) greets the new worker-to-be. And the title immediately brings to mind Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, written in Paris between 1906-08.

In this context, Duchamp's *In Advance* can be construed as his own "Making of an American": the snow shovel, rendered useless, providing his own line of work as a new immigrant in the US. Romanticism – Impressionism – more specifically Patriotic Impressionism as it is called on the Fantasia Antique site – the very core of the Independents' 1917 Exhibition – was thus turned inside out.

But there is more at play here than parody. Family resemblance, as Wittgenstein has taught us in his discussion of numbers and language games, is not duplication – a congerie, in this case, of shovels – but rather that resemblance which does not elide the crucial differences within it. As in the case of the *Nine Malic Moulds*, relatedness is not repetition.

It is this concept that Wittgenstein understood so profoundly and made central to his discussion of language games and numbers in the *Investigations*. The meaning of *shovel* is its use in the language. Just as those basic words like *blue* and *read* and *pain* must be understood contextually, so, Duchamp suggests, his own shovel, hanging from the ceiling like a mobile, takes on a very different aura from that in Hendrick Hillblom's *Making of an American*. Its real "family" includes, not hoes or spades or hammers, but the *Bicycle Wheel*, the *Bottle Dryer*, and the *Three Standard Stoppages* – all those pataphysical children of measurement and industry that bear the unique stamp of Duchamp's inventiveness and wit. They are members of the Duchamp family even as Wittgenstein's propositions are part of his. And as witnesses to a Modernist ethos now almost a century old, we readers / viewers can begin to see family resemblances between artists and thinkers who, until recently, were judged to have absolutely nothing in common.

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