

# The Dialectics of Design and Destruction: The *Degenerate Art* Exhibition (1937) and the *Exhibition internationale du* *Surréalisme* (1938)

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As a genre of cultural production, where iconic (painterly or photographic), sculptural, and architectural conventions intersect to represent the uniquely specific and current conditions of experience in public social space, exhibition design by artists has only recently emerged as a category of art-historical study. While earlier discussions of El Lissitzky's design of the *Pressa* exhibition in Cologne in 1928, an exhibition that likely had the widest-ranging impact and is the central example of such an emerging genre in the twentieth century, might have served as a point of departure,<sup>1</sup> Romy Golan's important, relatively recent book *Muralnomad*<sup>2</sup>—primarily concerned with the history of mural painting and its various transitions into exhibition design—has to be considered for the time being the most cohesive account of the development of these heretofore overlooked practices. Yet, paradoxically, two of the most notorious cases of the historical development of exhibition design after Lissitzky are absent from her study: the infamous *Degenerate Art* exhibition that opened in Munich on July 19, 1937 (two days after the opening of Nazi Fascism's first major propaganda building, Paul Ludwig Troost's Haus der Deutschen Kunst, and its presentation of German Fascist art in the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*),<sup>3</sup> and the *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris, which was installed by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp six months later and 427 miles to the west, on January 17, 1938, at Georges Wildenstein's Beaux Arts Galleries in Paris.<sup>4</sup>

1. See my essay "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 82–119; repr. in Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Essays on Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015).

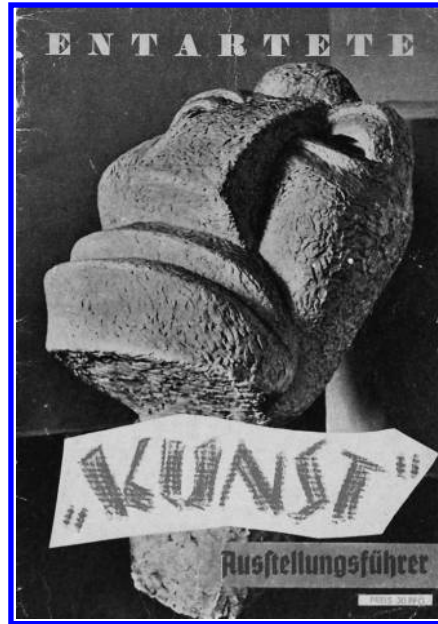
2. Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

3. We will in the following treat the two exhibitions, organized by Adolf Ziegler, more or less as a unit of two complementary elements, since the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* claimed to deliver what was absent from German culture during Weimar at that time, and the *Degenerate Art* exhibition claimed to destroy what had supposedly prevented the formation of a truly nationalist and Fascist cultural idiom during the Weimar period. Thus both exhibitions formed in fact a complementary propaganda operation that can serve us as a perfect sample of the ideological operations put in place at that time by the means of exhibition design.

4. The discussion of this extraordinary exhibition project has evolved slowly, typical of the reluctance with which art historians have approached exhibition designs by artists. One of the earliest attempts was Uwe M. Schneede's essay "Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, Paris 1938," in *Die Kunst der Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts*, ed. Bernd Klüser

The omission of these opposite yet significant and—as we will argue—in certain aspects eerily complementary cases might already justify the proposal we will pursue here: to compare two utterly incomparable projects that may well have concluded the genre of exhibition design by artists in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

One reason for the initial scholarly indifference towards the genre may be the fact that exhibition design had been perceived for the longest time as a subservient operation, as a sub-pictorial/sculptural and a sub-architectural set of practices, neither redefining the perceptual modes of painting, nor reordering object relations in the manner of sculpture, nor conceiving a different order of public space in the manner of architecture. Yet precisely because the more conventional practices of plasticity (i.e., painting and sculpture, drawing, and the graphic arts) were all on the verge of disappearing under the impact of an emerging mass-media apparatus, exhibition design as a synthesis of these highly differentiated residual conventions acquired an extraordinary centrality in the



*Exhibition guide, Degenerate Art (Munich). 1937. The cover features a sculpture by Otto Freundlich (The New Man, 1912).*

and Katharina Hegewisch (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1991). The most exhaustive and detailed exploration of Duchamp's exhibition designs is found in Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001). T. J. Demos's book *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007) is a theoretically more ambitious account of Duchamp's practices of exhibition—and object—design. Both texts were crucial in the formulation of part of my argument in this essay. For a more recent text, see Annabelle Görgen, *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, Paris 1938: Bluff und Täuschung—Die Ausstellung als Werk: Einflüsse aus dem 19. Jahrhundert unter dem Aspekt der Kohärenz* (Munich: Schreiber, 2008).

5. The literature on *Degenerate Art* is quite vast by now and growing. We refer only to the standard publications, from which we have drawn most of our knowledge: Peter Klaus Schuster's crucial anthology, *Die Kunststadt München 1937: Nationalsozialismus und "Entartete Kunst"* (Munich: Prestel, 1987); Stephanie Barron's foundational catalogue and exhibition "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994); and the more recent anthologies edited by Uwe Fleckner: *Das Verfemte Meisterwerk: Schicksalswege Moderner Kunst im "Dritten Reich"* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009), and *Angriff auf die Avantgarde* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007). The most recent English publication on the subject is Olaf Peters's major catalogue for the exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* (New York: Prestel, 2014). Walter Grasskamp's early and still very pertinent essay "'Entartete Kunst' und *documenta I*" provided a model of how productive such a comparison between seemingly incomparable exhibition projects can become when it is historically situated. See Grasskamp, *Die Unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989), pp. 76–119.



Invitation card for the opening of the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme announcing the appearance of Frankenstein's automaton descendant. Paris, 1938.

the newly emerging image regimes of photographic and cinematic production, or the object regimes of utilitarian function, they had also still articulated the unresolved conflicts between a presumably subjective, cognitive, and perceptual phenomenology and the fully planned and technologically mediated regimes of experience.<sup>6</sup> Because photography (both its production and reception) increasingly functioned as the homogenizing medium of the illustrated journals, it is in the hybrid forms of exhibition design that we can trace the gradual shift from a tactile and phenomenological suturing process that constituted an activated, participatory political subject to the total effacement of any critical and oppositional inscription of the subject within the system of propagandistically articulated ideological control.

Having been invested since its invention with the promise of an egalitarian image culture, photography would now find itself at the crossroads between product propaganda and the politics of spectacle on the one hand and political propaganda and politics *as spectacle* on the other.

Yet the newly conceived visual tropes and spatial sites of exhibition design by artists in the second and third decade of the twentieth century in Weimar Germany, from the *Dada-Messe* in Berlin in 1920 to Lissitzky's *Pressa* in 1928, had also already articulated a spectrum of emerging social conflicts. In the exhibition's material and

work of the most radical artists of the 1920s and '30s. And precisely because such a vast number of conflicting historical interests and ideological impulses operated simultaneously in these constructions, the hybridity of the format and the multiplicity of its means might now once again be of particular interest to historians.

To the very extent that early exhibition designs had still demarcated the various transitions between the increasingly manifest obsolescence of sculptural and pictorial forms and the

6. One only has to remember that El Lissitzky's first steps into the spatialization of perceptual experience, the *Proun Room* of 1923 (the design of which he famously referred to as a "transit station to architecture") and the *Cabinet of Abstraction* in Dresden in 1926, still excluded photographic images entirely from the actual display design itself.

ideological forms a rapidly disintegrating bourgeois public sphere seemed to yield—however briefly—to an emerging proletarian public sphere. Artists seemed to have realized that an uncontested mass-media public sphere would eventually lead to the triumphant spatialization of spectacle, or even prepare the grounds for a Fascist or state-socialist totalitarian sphere. By the early 1930s, in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union, fully controlled homogenous technologies and sites of mass-cultural induction corresponded to the hierarchical forms of indoctrination that advertisement and product propaganda had long since performed in the Western capitalist world, where the place and the purpose of the subject had always already been decided in advance.

Not surprisingly then, Lissitzky's *Pressa* had been instantly recognized by the Fascist government of Italy, and then shortly thereafter by the Nazi Fascists of Germany, as a model that could provide a highly productive and dynamic fusion of textual and visual devices for the propaganda of the newly established totalitarian state apparatuses. Following the collectivist production precedent of *Pressa* (more than eighty artists worked on it), Dino Alfieri's *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* in 1932 called upon not only historians to assist in the research and design of the exhibition but also several major figures from the contradictory modernity of Italian Fascism. Drawing on the most opposed artistic currents of the era, it synthesized the work of artists such as the *pittura metafisica* painter Mario Sironi and the modernist architect Giuseppe Terragni, as well as the Futurist Enrico Prampolini and the rationalist architect Adalberto Libera.

Thus in the space of a mere four years, the initial potential of exhibition design to represent objectively given conditions of collective participation in the processes of production had been inverted. Now exhibition design manifested the way in which the very same media and means—i.e., the photographically enlarged image and the expanded spatial dynamic structuring of display devices—sutured an activated spectator into the ideological state apparatuses



*Anonymous postcard (possibly Heinrich Hoffmann). Installation of desecrated works in Degenerate Art. Munich, 1937.*

and transformed the beginnings of a proletarian public sphere into the first Fascist media public sphere.

Not surprisingly, ten years after the heroic moment of exhibition design in Lissitzky's work, we encounter not only a decisive decline of the genre but dialectics of an altogether different kind. On the one hand, in the German context, a Fascist "artist's" design would now enforce the tasks of violently racist and reactionary propaganda, enforcing an exclusionary return to the painterly figments of an imaginary, cohesive, masculinist culture of the patriarchal nation-state. On the other, Marcel Duchamp, when facing the failures of French Surrealism with melancholic and derisive amusement, would stage transit stations, in reverse, on a line from models of revolutionary or Fascist public space toward the registers of the uncanny and the repressed. **What figured most prominently in Duchamp's design was the insight that the public sphere of political self-constitution in Western capitalism had been increasingly eroded by the private regimes of fetishization in the proto-totalitarian practices of universal consumption.** Mediated by the apparatus of fashion and design, the now-mythical forms of bourgeois subjectivity were symbolically rehearsed in acts of a collectivized specular mediation, if not a prostitution of the self. Earlier than anyone at that time, **Duchamp seems to have recognized that by defining the self in perpetually varying acts of combinatory consumption, capitalist**

**production would control from now on the supposedly self-determining subject in merely symbolic processes of choice, decision, and participation.**

Even if profoundly different in their orientations and in their operations and impact, these two (or rather, three) exhibitions nevertheless share some crucial features. First of all, the peculiar intensity with which they banish the genres and practices of modernist photography and photomontage from their premises. Obviously the photographic image is occasionally present in both exhibitions (as a polemical placard, for example, and as an image documenting various objects). But what is rigorously denied, if not prohibited, is precisely the media optimism of the



*Visitors with flashlights inspecting the paintings of the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme. 1938.*

'20s, according to which photography had supposedly dislodged the traditional centrality of painterly and sculptural conventions.

In manifest opposition to this famous optimism and through the means of phobic denial of photography's sociopolitical potential, the Munich exhibition constructs a manic projection of an imaginary enforcement of a return to painterly patriarchy.<sup>7</sup> In stark contrast, yet in a similar disavowal of the photographic as a medium of public communicative emancipation, the Paris case, divining that spectacularized objects of consumption will become that culture's final destination, delivers vistas of a gloomy present, a seemingly inexorable descent of cultural representations into a sphere of privacy and ready-made deprivation.

If both of these exhibitions evacuated the sphere of the photographic, which—since its invention—had given modernity's projects of emancipation their greatest dynamism with its steadily expanding promises of different tools and spaces of representation for a new, democratically collectivized subjectivity (proletarian or other, not yet politically specified, forms of post-bourgeois class identity), they also engaged in dramatically different ways with the precarious conditions of pictorial and sculptural practices that the avant-gardes of the 1910s and '20s had left for the '30s to contemplate.

Lastly, both exhibitions claimed either mythical or mnemonic forms as integral dimensions of the public sphere. In the case of Munich, myth obviously served as the violently enforced trajectory of ideological projections that would rule the future of Fascist representations in Germany. By contrast, in Paris, Duchamp staged mythical subjects and objects alike as grotesque travesties, and dismantled myth in its most secular yet increasingly powerful forms, permeating every detail of everyday life. Thus, we might argue that the two exhibitions shared yet another feature justifying our comparison of the incomparable: the fact that they were both driven by profound, if fundamentally different, critiques of modernist abstraction, and by the paradoxical desire for a return of the figure. Yet once again, nothing could be more contrary than the two types of figuration that emerge in these exhibitions. The *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* mobilized the armored body in all of its possible configurations.<sup>8</sup> Ziegler's pornographic Fascist pinups were disguised as transhistorical mythical figures and armored bodies (e.g., *The Judgement of Paris*, or *The Four Elements*). These apotropaic depictions of the female body were to protect the Fascist patriarchal male from his fears of particularization and fragmentation.

While the Nazi painter Adolf Ziegler initiated a public show trial and violent prosecution of Weimar's painterly avant-gardes in order to restore the fictions of a premodern foundation of German painting in the adjacent *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, Duchamp approached the renewed desires for figuration and the legacies of Surrealist easel painting with utter derision. And while the German prose-

7. Hitler himself was, of course, notorious for having declared on frequent occasions that he considered those paintings to be his favorites that approximated the qualities of the photograph most.

8. For the groundbreaking and still singularly valid discussion of the armored body in the context of Fascism, see Hal Foster's "Armor Fou," in *October* 56 (Spring 1991), pp. 64–97.

cution seems to have condemned Weimar painting and sculpture first of all for having succeeded in its historical synchronization with the actual governing conditions of advanced capitalist modernity, the French critique seems to have condemned painting for having insufficiently articulated the actual ruling conditions of the fetishization of experience under the conditions of capitalist commodity culture.

For if the German exhibition of so-called degenerate art made the public destruction of avant-garde culture its explicit goal, that destruction was only one element in a larger project to accelerate the control of the cultural public sphere by Nazi Fascist ideology. Its overall antimodernist project was to install a Fascist system in which fictions of national origins and ethnic belonging, organicist and preindustrial myths of unmediated experience, and most of all practices of artisanal skills and masteries, would all be resurrected to provide the imaginary reconciliation of the foundational conflicts of capitalist modernity.<sup>9</sup>

In manifest contrast, Duchamp's annihilation of painting and sculpture articulated the fact that the revolutionary aspirations of the avant-gardes of the '20s had now been put under duress by many different forces and had become exhausted by the time of the return to easel painting. Duchamp's design revealed Surrealism's epistemological fatigue, if not failure. It obviously did not advocate a return to obsolete forms of representation and earlier practices of painterly production. Quite the opposite: It insisted on the necessity of assimilating the aesthetic object, even if only in grotesque mimesis, more rigorously to the conditions determining the subject's object experience in everyday life. Thus Duchamp's design of the exhibition was a public performance of sublime self-immolation: The travesties of the anti-aesthetic would run the full course to a devastating conclusion of avant-garde aspirations, a grotesque-comical coda to the radical theater with which Dada and Surrealism had originally aspired to bring about the end of art. In the face of an imminent war, the avant-garde's utopian claims and pretenses of the '20s could not possibly be sustained any longer with any credibility.

In the following, I will sketch out some of the key concepts that emerge as the central terms of these historically overdetermined moments of crisis, as they were brought into focus by the dialectics of these two exhibitions. The first concept I name the dialectics of deskilling and re-skilling; the second, the continuity/discontinuity of nation-state culture; and the third, the resulting enforcement of exile as a universal condition.

### *Deskilling and Re-skilling*

The rhetoric of the Nazi exhibition was exhortative and prohibitive; it claimed to have restored the normative criteria according to which artistic produc-

9. At the order of Adolf Ziegler, these museums would be raided by the Fascist Party apparatus over a period of three months during which the exhibition was planned. The museum directors and art historians who had assembled these collections either were dismissed from their posts soon thereafter or resigned in advance of further persecutions to come.

tion would from now on have to be conceived, produced, and staged. Apart from its Fascist will to power to undo the recently formed first steps of an actual democratic culture in Weimar Germany, and apart from its racist and fascist program, one of the exhibition's central conflicts was the dualism of deskilling and re-skilling. Its argument aimed, of course, to reconstitute the skills of painterly and sculptural manufacture at the level of an imagined tradition and the imaginary unity of nation-state culture. After all, beyond the enforcement of racist prosecution and the destruction of the "Other," the resurrection of the myths of hierarchical orders was at stake, and the prescriptive control and execution of skills served best as the reaffirmation of the hierarchical structure of experiences and the myths of social and subjective distinction. Ziegler's call to arms in this now violent return to order (ten years earlier in France, the *retour à l'ordre* had not yet called upon the state police for enforcement) was driven by a pornography of promises, ideological, social, aesthetic, and psychosexual, to restore all the mythical forms of experience at once. Painting, having returned to its artisanal foundations, promised to anchor these pornographic impulses in the pretense to resurrect their immutable foundations. These ranged from the promise to reestablish the psychosexual formations of uncontested masculinist identity to the mandate to reestablish painting and sculpture in a hierarchical social position. The ideological pretenses for the necessity of re-skilling, delivered here as a project of purification of the social body and of the body politic, are simultaneously grotesque and murderous, since they reclaim access to structures of patriarchal power that had been all but dissolved by the actually ruling conditions of social relations and economic production.

Thus, we can state that the two exhibitions predicted two of the foundational cultural models of imaginary subject formations in the twentieth century, both of course being enacted already at the time in various preliminary forms. On the one hand, the quintessentially Fascist phantasmagoria of an imaginary homeland reconstituted along the figments of the nation-state, and an imaginary subject reconstituted according to the principles of a long-lost and deeply discredited heterosexist and patriarchal rule.

On the other hand, we have a passive encounter with the already enforced violence of the regimes of total reification, where the Surrealist object assemblage merely registers the already existing proto-totalitarian forms of domination by the world of consumption. In public acts of an allegorical annihilation of the work of art itself, it registers the impact of these regimes with the last forms of resistance. Now the figures and subjects of aesthetic experience appear in the most literal figurations possible, as mere accidental accumulations of aleatory constellations of objects, following the principle of the *cadavre exquis*. The agency of these artistic subjects seems to have evaporated altogether, leaving the subject of spectatorial interaction literally in the dark, with the cavernous displays in which the spectators have to search out aesthetic experiences with a flashlight.



Thus, on the other side of the historical divide, in Paris, we encounter the total opposite to the resurrection of skills, namely, the final submersion of the subject in the insurmountable totality of object and commodity production according to the laws of consumption. We can read the mannequins on display at the Surrealist exhibition literally: not only as exquisite corpses resulting from random object accumulations, but as records of how the aesthetic and the unconscious are figured once the regime of the cyclical alterations of the commodity image have taken over all facets of subjectivity.

Duchamp's exhibition design not only anticipated and allegorized the inevitable consequences of the Surrealist avant-garde's innate, or involuntary, tendencies towards pictorialization (after all, Surrealist painting had by that time eroded its own original radical opposition to pictorial forms in order to mimetically assimilate itself to the very principles it had initially opposed: fashion and fetishization, commodity culture and spectacularization). It also responded with diagnostic vehemence to the ultimate consequences of these imminent historical tendencies: that the destruction of the bourgeois public sphere would eventually not only generate the Fascist realities already established in Germany but that similar demands would inevitably originate from within the deteriorating core of French bourgeois culture itself.

This diagnosis of an uncanny present and a sinister future was strikingly evident in one of Duchamp's most egregious design decisions: to suspend a supposed 1,200 empty coal bags from the ceiling of the main exhibition space above a single, electrically illuminated coal brazier. Under the impact of the vibrations caused by loudspeakers blasting German military marches, the sacks slowly and steadily released coal dust upon the curious visitors. The specific references of this dramatic and histrionic design do not seem to have been fully recognized. After all, Duchamp's comical reversal of the chthonic (suspended from above rather than rising from below) and the com-



*Denise Bellon. Marcel Duchamp's  
Brazier at Exposition internationale  
du Surréalisme. 1938.  
© Les films de l'équinoxe—Fonds  
photographique Denise Bellon.*

bination of tellurian invocations with military marches can only have been the canny artist's responses to the incessantly growing intensity of the ideological cult speeches urging a return to the earth, to the hearth (from Heidegger to Hitler to Pétain), and the reclaiming of native and nationalist grounds. The intimacies of the private spaces of the home, and the politically aggressive deprivations performed in the name of the homeland, so violently promulgated by official Nazi culture since 1933, would soon find their manifestations of previously latent undercurrents in France in similar or identical terms. In that context, the lonely coal brazier, a common heating device in Parisian café terraces during colder months, undoubtedly functioned as a similarly hilarious metonymy of the increasingly common Fascist mythification of *la flamme*: flames, torches, and fires. Even more productively, it also necessitated—as the sole source of illumination—that the spectators wander through the exhibition after having been handed flashlights, the modern battery torches being the only means to inspect the withering genre of Surrealist easel paintings in the exhibition's tenebrous spaces.<sup>10</sup>

A second reason to endow the spectators with flashlights in the dark might have been to confront them with their own prurience, the driving desire to inspect whatever is on display, whenever it might be so. With his strategy of exhibiting spectators to each other and to themselves while they pretend to look at paintings, Duchamp in fact exposed the craving for the totalization of exhibition value, the singularly valid form of collective social behavior that would define the second half of the twentieth century and the present more than any form of collective communication.<sup>11</sup>

But we will have to suggest that both exhibitions paradoxically shared one more decisive feature, the actual annihilation of the aesthetic sphere itself, i.e., the epistemological, social, and symbolic spaces within which—throughout the history of modernism—*dispositifs* of a potential, actual, or future autonomy of the subject had been articulated. **The subject's acquired and intuitive capacities for experiencing aesthetic objects and conventions, as well as socially and politically developed forms of cultural representation, seemed no longer a guaranteed condition.** After all, the institutions and the spaces of the bourgeois public sphere (e.g., the museum) that had traditionally guaranteed these forms and conventions of aesthetic

10. It seems extremely unlikely that only the pragmatics of illumination under the conditions of a fire hazard caused by the coal dust motivated the deployment of flashlights, as some authors have argued. Rather, we would suggest that this is in fact only the first instance of Duchamp's extremely subversive and polemical intervention against easel painting with the means of exhibition design itself. The second, and no less devastatingly comical, annihilation would happen in New York in 1942, at the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibit at the Reid Mansion in New York, where Duchamp all but completely blocked access to the easel paintings on display by hanging sixteen miles of string in the manner of a web in front of the exhibition's paintings, barring spectators from accessing its painterly objects.

11. Duchamp's exhibition of viewers viewing had distant echoes in much later work, as, for example, in Michael Asher's contribution to the *74th American Exhibition* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1982 when the artist paid viewers to spend circumscribed periods of time standing in front of specifically assigned paintings of the permanent collection of the museum. Or, with a bit less subtlety, in David Hammons's *Concerto in Black and Blue* at ACE Gallery, New York, in 2003, where visitors were handed tiny flashlights emitting blue light and left to meander through the darkened and empty gallery spaces, only to see other visitors engaged in the same futile activity.

experience were no longer operative once Nazi Fascism or state socialism, on the one hand, and spectacularized consumption, on the other, had come to power.

If Duchamp's phantasmagoria of a fallen world had sacrificed the aesthetic promises of an autonomous experience guaranteed by modernist pictorial forms, it had also exchanged it for a melancholic travesty of the actually governing conditions of experience. In Paris, artists ostentatiously brought about the recognition that the universally enforced regime of pure economic exchange and the production of surplus value would become the ultimate framing condition for the perception of objects that had formerly defined aesthetic experience.

Undoubtedly this is one of the reasons why Duchamp's passageway of mannequins mobilizes a public sphere of layered spatial and social functions. Space is now charged exclusively with exhibition value, regardless of whether we see the street and its figures as the window display of a department store, the runway of a fashion parade, or an alley of prostitution. Each of the individual mannequins was designed by the participating artists around the increasingly urgent question of whether emerging proto-totalitarian object relations would eventually annihilate the possibility of aesthetic and architectural experience altogether, and whether they would foil any future attempts even to conceive of a space in which alternative subjectivities and fundamentally different social relations could still be imagined.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Munich myth of a unified subjectivity under the rule of the fiction of the nation-state is confronted here with a different form of enforced violation, namely, a principle of *prostitution universelle* as the governing condition of a globalized structure of unified forms of object relations and experience at large.

Once again, the combinatory female figures springing from Duchamp's design could not have opposed the messages from Munich more dramatically and compellingly. In fact, Duchamp's troupe of mad mannequins (one could almost call them his *Demoiselles* since they continue the age-old French modernist tradition of putting the prostitute as painting's social muse on public display) perfectly enacts the dis-arming of the mythical Fascist body. Yet since these figures implement fetishization and particularization on every bodily level in a perpetual principle of combinatory exchange, they deliberately reorganize the figure in manifest opposition to the socially constructed bodily hierarchies of the subject. Through multiple acts of dislocation and substitution, these figures dismantle both the supposedly crowning achievement of the developmental stage of heterosexual genitality and the hierarchical order of an anatomy of cephalic supremacy.

This *ars combinatoria* of the models on display in the streets—the names of which invoke, among other things, the recent past and the imminent future of war (e.g., *Rue de la transfusion de sang*)—draws on various prefigurations of the breakdowns that the anthropomorphic body had experienced in twentieth-cen-

12. In terms of a contemporary continuation and expansion of these issues, once again literally embodied in storefront mannequins, one would only have to think of the frequency with which these "new figurations" have appeared in the sculptural work of Thomas Hirschhorn, or more recently and often even more poignantly, in Isa Genzken's series entitled *Actors* (2012–14).



*Left: Constantin Brancusi. Adam and Eve. 1921.*

*2014 ARS, New York/ADAGP, Paris.*

*Center: John Heartfield and George Grosz. The Petty Bourgeois Philistine John Heartfield Gone Wild. 1920 (reconstruction).*

*2014 ARS, New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.*

*Right: Man Ray. Marcel Duchamp's Mannequin Rose Sélavy, at Exposition internationale du Surréalisme. 1938.*

*2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.*

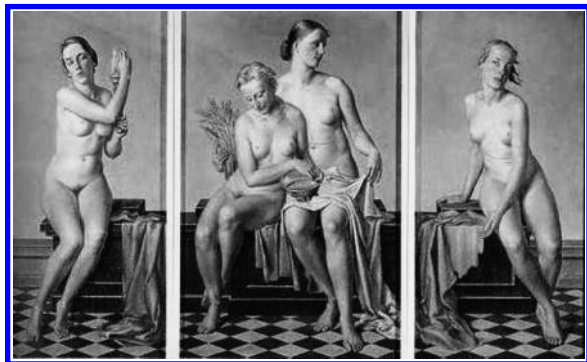
ture sculpture. Whether through Constantin Brancusi's simultaneously classicizing biomorphs and primitivizing mechanomorphs, or the post-WWI Dada hybrids of prosthetic war cripples and shopwindow dummies by John Heartfield, et al. at the *Dada-Messe* in Berlin in 1920, sculpture's desire to sustain the holistic figure of the subject had already been dislodged. The mannequins in Duchamp's street, however, bring this tendency to an unexpected climax, since they combine the mnemonic and/or fetishistic objects of desire with a violent affirmation of the part object as the only figment that can truthfully tell the story of the subject's actual forms of disintegration. This derisive articulation of a groundless and dislodged subjectivity, where neither genealogy nor the nation-state nor the (be-)longings of a class could claim identities any longer, was most evident in Duchamp's own mannequin: a half-bared female figure, dressed in what appear to be Duchamp's own hat and jacket, as if the banal clothes of an office clerk could best present androgynous identity as a common condition (a representation of androgynous identity now far removed even from Duchamp's

earlier and quite dramatic disguise as *Rose Sélavy* in 1919).<sup>13</sup> The absurdity of any attempt at maintaining mythical subject constructions along the lines of gendered identity was here brought to an unforeseen height of understatement (in manifest contrast, of course, to the often outré and, not surprisingly, sexist configurations concocted by some of his Surrealist peers in the project).

Kurt Seligmann's velvet-cushioned side table, dolled up with its four neatly shod little female legs, could not have offered a better antidote to the obscenity of Ziegler's *Four Elements* (exhibited as a "masterpiece" at the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*)—a painting so much admired by the Führer himself that he decided it should henceforth inhabit the privileged space over his fireplace. Seligmann's sculpture also taught (and still can teach) a lesson about the necessity of further particularizing and dismantling the genre of the female nude, that ostensibly transhistorical, actually merely patriarchal and masculinist model of painterly sublimation (expanded, typically, at that time in Paris, in Picasso's endless nudes of the late '20s and early '30s, which were so beloved by some of the Surrealists).

If a combinatory logic constituted the figures in Duchamp's exhibition, one that constituted ever-new combinations of desire, a similar combinatory logic also defined the constellation of spatial orders and social spheres in Duchamp's design. The layered conglomerate of these spatial structures seemed to trace crucial elements defining the subject's experience in everyday life: the architectural sphere of the street with the object sphere of commodity display, the discursive and semiotic sphere of fashion with the socioeconomic and psychosexual sphere of prostitution, and the sphere of gendered identities with the spheres of common conditions of consumption.

Thus Duchamp's exhibition design had acquired the most topical and the most prognostic structure in 1938, positioning itself at equal remove from the utopian features that had been typical of exhibition design of the '20s and from their Fascist destruction. Yet it not only detached exhibition design from the sphere and medium of photography as a symbolic system of public



*Adolf Ziegler. The Four Elements. 1937.*  
© Adolf Ziegler, EKS and Marco-VG, Bonn.

13. According to Man Ray's account, Duchamp simply deposited his hat and coat on the rented shopwindow figure that had been assigned to him. While this account has not been verified, it seems perfectly plausible, given Duchamp's history of notoriously lapidary interventions while others had to go through grand gestures and operations to state their positions.



*Kurt Seligmann. L'Ultrameuble  
at the Exposition internationale  
du Surréalisme. 1938.  
Orange County Citizens  
Foundation/ARS, New York.*

representation, it dissolved the radical aspirations towards architectural space as a ground for potentially new forms of simultaneous collective perception. As Duchamp's design mimetically followed the historical pressures to refigure the representation of the subject as a constellation of external objects, it not only dislodged the supremacy of sculpture to figure the body but also distanced itself dramatically from the readymade, that most consequential episteme of radical opposition in 1917, by situating the disintegrated subject now simultaneously at the intersection of all processes of reification.