

## The 20<sup>th</sup> century – conformism and dissent in artistic technique, the opposition between tradition and innovation

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### **Abstract:**

This article presents the rapid changes in art that took place at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to scientific and technological progress: the electricity, the telegraph, the radio, later on the television, atomic physics, petrochemical products, plastic, computers, and so on. My analysis draws on how fast culture reinvented itself through technology, the conquests of the Industrial Revolution being an important stimulus for artists' imagination that fought against tradition. It is noted, therefore, in the first decades of the twentieth century a new sense of experimentation emphasized in art. The transformations that materials and artistic media undergo are radical, the artistic techniques used so far (painting, sculpture, drawing, architecture) being affected by "loans" coming from the utility area, the non – aesthetic area. This article focuses on the changes of artistic technique and mediums invented by the artists of Cubism, Dada Movement, Surrealism and Constructivism.

**Keywords:** material, technique, Cubism, Dada Movement, Surrealism and Constructivism, ready made, collage, assemblage

The twentieth century, and more precisely the first decade was marked by a strong idealism and by the belief that there is still a lot to discover, to explore and Art can find the necessary metaphors/ forms of expression as a means of explaining a radically changed culture. The industrial revolution, born in the very eighteenth century, finds its climax in the next century throughout the transformations imposed by the discovery of steam, steel, railways and so on and twentieth century is represented by faster and spectacular changes thanks to advances in science and technology: electricity, telegraph, telephone, radio and later television, atomic physics, petrochemicals, plastics, computers etc.

"The modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture" – Jackson Pollock (F. V. O'Connor, 1967: 79–81)<sup>1</sup>.

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The rapidity with which the culture was reinvented by technology seems supernatural. These “stimulus” provoked the artists’ imagination in that period, who rebelled against technical limitations of tradition. It is noted, therefore, in the first decades of the twentieth century a new sense of experimentation emphasized in art. The transformations that materials and artistic media undergo are radical, the artistic techniques used so far (painting, sculpture, drawing, architecture) being affected by “loans” coming from the utility area, the non – aesthetic area.

“A new form of art appears not only in order to express new content, but also in order to replace an old form, which has already lost artistic value. [...] Art is a way to experience the artistic quality of an object, the object is not important” (Shklovsky, 1973: 48–72).

Technologies developed for utilitarian purposes are often easily adapted to new forms of art (*collage, assemblage, ready-made*) while traditional artistic techniques – painting, drawing, sculpture – conquer by the variety of media and mediums used. Collages and assemblages contain the so-called ephemera that is printed materials that have “age limit”: tickets, leaflets, promotional materials, receipts, product labels, badges, invoices, posters, postcards, and so on.

These things being cheaper products, they have a short life due to acidic materials that compose them, so it is a challenge to preserve the achievements of the turn of the century.

This chapter will pursue the innovations brought by the artists of the first half of the twentieth century in their achievements, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional as well. The traditional support though, either paper or cloth, had the fewest alterations made by artists, for it was invaded by new materials, recent discoveries, becoming an area of creative sensations unknown so far.

Cubists were the first to introduce the conquests of technical progress both in form, giving modernity through analysis and synthesis, and in the medium too, through their searches in the area of its materiality, opacity and consistency, mixing oil paints with sand, gypsum, ash, and so on. Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris are the inventors of this “substance” which helped them achieve the expression of a “new reality”, of a “new space”. In this way the cubists succeeded in energizing the canvas, illustrating with clarity the rhythm of life at the beginning of the twentieth century.

I will quickly review the most notable moments of those changes in art, starting with the spring of 1912, when Pablo Picasso created a collage in his work entitled *Still Life with Chair Caning*, in which,

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<sup>1</sup> F. V. O’Connor, 1967, a remarkable interview that shows the artist’s genius.

amongst the compositional elements (lemons, oysters, glass, pipe and newspaper) the artist stuck a piece of oilcloth that had the design pattern of a cane chair, indicating its presence without applying the traditional methods.

Pablo Picasso, by introducing this element (and others later) of mass production, opened art towards the industry of the present. In September of that year, Georges Braque was to create the first Cubist *papier collé*, a collage made of pasted papers: *Fruit dish and Glass*.

In the summer of 1912, Braque and Picasso were working in Sorgues in the south of France. Braque later recalled that one day, while wandering around the nearby city of Avignon, he noticed a roll of faux bois wallpaper displayed in a shop window. Braque waited until Picasso departed for Paris before incorporating pieces of the mechanically printed, fake wood grain paper into a series of charcoal drawings. These fragments from the real world add significant meaning to the fictive world of the picture: they can be interpreted as the front drawer of the table (onto which Braque drew a circular knob), the floor, or the wall of the bar. This collage marked a turning point in Cubism. Braque later said “After having made the *papier collé*, I felt a great shock and it was an even greater shock to Picasso when I showed it to him. (<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/view?oid=490612>, accessed at 19.09.2015)

Preferred materials in this technique were strips of newspaper, wrapping paper, wallpaper. Braque uses gouache, chalk, newspaper and pressboard in works such as *Mandolin, violin and newspaper* (1913), *Mandolin* (1914). The collage, as its author defines it, involves the assembly of disparate substances and materials, involving the insertion (in a given context) a different entity.

“We sought to express reality with materials we did not know how to handle” (Sabartes, 1948)<sup>2</sup>.

Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris and others have sought to emphasize the material density of their “paintings”, experimenting by adding elements coming from utilitarian area, mixing oil colors with sand, sawdust, filings and pasting on the surface of the canvas playing cards, business cards, tickets, packages of cigarettes, labels of mass consuming products and other “found” objects, in such a manner that these collages can be called “relief” or “painting – objects” that can be hung on the wall. Juan Gris goes even further, for his work *The Lavabo* (1912) is a collage incorporating a fragment of a mirror in the center of the composition, considering that no painting technique might not have its reflective qualities, so Art is reality.

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<sup>2</sup> The different techniques of Picasso’s collages of appear for the first time described in detail in this volume.

“We drew with scissors, adhesives, plaster, burlap, paper and other new instruments and materials; we made collages and montages” confesses Hugo Ball (Richter, 1966)<sup>3</sup>.

Dadaist collages, subsequent to the Cubist ones, were much more focussed towards a descriptive manner of expression, offering an even wider range of items deriving from mass consumer, present on two-dimensional surfaces.

In his collages, Francis Picabia adds various materials to paintings, such as feathers, matches, hair pins, sticks of bamboo, etc., as can be seen in works such *Feathers* (1921) in which over oil painting he overlapped feathers and sticks of bamboo arranged so as to create images of palm trees or trees with lush foliage.

In Hanover, the development of „Dada” movement faced the existence of a singular character, the painter and poet Kurt Schwitters, who was considered, rightly, the symbol of the individualist and utopian spirit of Dada artists in Lower Saxony. Refusing, in 1919, all accepted forms and traditions, Schwitters compose a self aesthetic founded on replacing the noble materials of painting with discarded objects, his paintings containing data of the worldly objects would be invaded, gradually, by all movements of artistic and intellectual emancipation from the early twentieth century.

Under the auspices of the “Der Sturm” magazine and together with other Dadaists, Kurt Schwitters presents to the public of Berlin his first relief – paintings (the *Merzbilder* cycles) expanding, in this way, their conception of “total art” together with theater and poetry and, especially, architectural *Merzbau* forms, whose constituent parts are juxtaposed in an automatic dictation derived from the fact that the image arising in consciousness instantly produce other ones, similar to onirical revelations. I shall return in the following lines with a broader presentation of Kurt Schwitters, because his artistic personality created a milestone in the evolution of art in terms of the ephemeral and durable means of expression.

Another unique work in terms of the visual appearance on the two-dimensional support is *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, created by Marcel Duchamp between 1915–1923. He relies rather on conceptual achievement of the work, on mental perception than on the visual one. “My search [...] is to find a way of expressing myself without painting, without being a writer [...] and also to produce

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<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive edition about Dada art especially from the author’s perspective who, it is well known, was linked to this revolutionary movement in European and American culture and mentality.

something that it is a project of my own. [...] The mixture between idea and visual representation interested me as a technique because it is about a new technique” (Richter).

The Surrealists also approached this technique in order to achieve a fantastic dream like narration. Max Ernst’s first creations were illogical compositions such as *Here everything still floats* (1920), in which the artist joins clippings of photos of insects, fish, anatomical drawings, in order to suggest the multiple identity of the illustrated elements.

Max Ernst is the inventor of the *frottage*<sup>4</sup> technique which is well-known that means printing an area slightly into relief (leaves, wood, cloth with different grains) by overlaying a sheet of paper and rubbing it with a pencil, of the *grattage*<sup>5</sup> technique in which the *frottage* is transferred to oil painting by scratching the painted surface and of *decalcomania*, a technique that produces the transfer of an image from a canvas to another, in order to create surreal fantastic images. Another technical invention of Surrealism is the *fumage*, created by Wolfgang Paalen in the late 30s, in which the image is created by the movement of a candle under a sheet of paper and this shows that there is a tendency of Surrealism to focus more on the materials used by the artist. This trend is represented by “automatic” drawing technique practiced by Juan Miro, Paul Klee and André Masson, in which these artists let the pen or drawing instrument slide freely, without following a certain plan. André Masson tried to achieve the same result in painting by drawing a network of lines with an adhesive substance on the canvas and then adding color by applying different layers of colored sand (*Battle of Fishes*, 1926)

Staying in the area of two-dimensional supports, one must also mention the photomontages created by the Dadaists, works that clearly illustrate the changes that mass media materials of that period underwent (manifests, magazines, posters, book covers, photographs, newspapers, and so on), cropped and juxtaposed in challenging compositions.

“We were the first to use photography in order to create totally separated elements from the spatial and material point of view, a new unit to illustrate a new visual and conceptual image” Raoul Hausmann (Richter, *ibidem*).

Remarkable examples of this technique were created by Raoul Hausmann (*Gurk*, 1918, *Tatlin at home*, 1920), John Heartfield (*Dada-Fotomontage*, 1920), Max Ernst (*Selfportrait*, 1920), George Grosz (*Daum marries her pedantic automaton “George”*, 1920), Hannach Höch (*The Beautiful Girl*, 1920, *Dada-Danse*, 1919–1921).

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<sup>4</sup> Frottage is the French word for rubbing.

<sup>5</sup> Scraping

However, the most important mutations that art undertook from the field of the industrial product, of the non-aesthetic zone, developed clearly with the invention of the *assemblages*, the constructions, the ready made or *objet trouvé* that have revolutionized artistic forms starting from 1911. At that time, the futurist Umberto Boccioni anticipated the targets of Dada movement of transforming the spirit and the artistic techniques by using new materials such as cardboard, wire, pieces of wood, metal, and so on. Remarkable in this respect is the work entitled *Horse* (1911), made in metal and cardboard, to which he added painting. Very interesting is the way in which Boccioni used the quality of the material in order to describe volumes, the metal (sheet metal) describing round shapes and curves and the cardboard for creating sharp angles and straight lines. Yet nothing compares to the extremely rich assemblages created by the Dadaist Kurt Schwitters.

Naming his artistic products *Mertzbild* (a nonsense term that comes from the second syllable of the German word *Kommertz*), Schwitters gathers and composes any kind of useless (for others) material, but artistic substance for him. Therefore, in the assemblage entitled *Mathias*, 1919, amongst labels and paper clips with this name, the artist includes in the composition fragments of ropes, sticks of wood, wire nets, can caps whom rectilinear and curved forms contribute to the balance of the composition. *Mertzbild*, 1919 was achieved by joining and juxtaposing of cards, pieces of sackcloth, sticks of wood, string, buttons, vinyl and many other objects, and at the center right, the artist writes on a cardboard his name and his address. But the most famous artwork created by Kurt Schwitters is the well known *Mertzbau* (*mertz* construction), a three-dimension assemblage conceived as a *Cathedral of erotic misery* of everyday life. For 13 years (1923–1936) he collected all kinds of objects until had no place to fill. This magnificent work is perhaps an example of „installation” *avant- la-lettre*, in which every object becomes part of the artwork. With impressive (3.5 x 2 x 1 m) dimensions, the assemblage comprised of a column traversing the two floors of the building, the whole house being actually “crossed up and down by passages like mine shafts, by crevices created artificially along floors, by snail-shaped tunnels, all those linking the cellar and the peak of the construction” – Hans Arp (Dachy, 1994). In this maze of tunnels there were wafers called “grottos” where Schwitters placed candles to light the construction, and each cave contained objects collected by the artist over the years: the treasure of the Nibelungs with thousands of shiny objects, a cave dedicated to Wolfgang Goethe decorated with a “leg” of the poet embodying a relic, “pencils totally consumed by poetry” – a corner dedicated to Luther, a brothel with a dame with three

legs designed by Hannah Höch and in another niche a box containing a doll aimed to illustrate the tomb of Saint Cecilia.

Kurt Schwitters created collages from almost anything that fell into his hands: tram tickets, envelopes, processed cheese or cigarettes wrap – everything that was thrown – and he raised them to the rank of art. Kurt Schwitters is the first of the artists who established the installation of useless objects in his own house, and legend has it that the floor where he lived collapsed not during war bombing, but caused by the weight of things collected over the years. There was in Kurt Schwitters' art a continuous interaction of different forms of expression and this happened at a high level of achievement.

In this respect, the artist, unique in its kind, affirmed: "My name Merz" and writes: "Everything an artist spits is art" ([www.schwitters-stiftung.de](http://www.schwitters-stiftung.de), 2001)<sup>6</sup>.

Without exceeding the limits, I can say that Kurt Schwitters embodied the history of modern art. The artist painted, created collages, assemblages and was interested in architecture and urban environment. He was one of the great typographers of his time, high rank representative of concrete poetry, he was a theater writer and theorist, contributing to the differentiation of these art forms in order to reach the total realization of the artwork. Painting leads him to collages and these transform, progressively, the poetry which, in turn, gives impulses to the composition and graphic texts. Addressing the plastic or literary work of Kurt Schwitters, I am impressed by the contrast and the apparent relationship between negligence and great formal accuracy.

Unfortunately, only the memories of his contemporaries and some photos can be testimony of this artwork, for this grandiose installation was destroyed in the war.

Representative for the Dada movement, Raoul Hausmann should also be noted with a significant work from the point of view of importing elements of everyday life in art: *The spirit of our time*, created in 1921. It is an assemblage based on a wooden sculpture – a masculine head "enriched" with objects that suggest the action of measurement: "the objects are common devices such as a ruler and parts of a typewriter and watch. They are devices of measurement and information. The tools attach to the wood like they are a part of the human head. The ruler curves down the forehead as if it no different from the skin. There are instruments stuck to the sides seemingly replacing the ears. The head has been transformed into its own form of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.schwitters-stiftung.de/english/bio-ks2.html>, accessed at 11.10. 2013, Kurt and Ernst Schwitters Foundation, Artist Biography

instrument” (Elger, Taschen, 2004: 38). The title of the work is significant for all of the issues of that time, a kind of *Carpe Diem* at the beginning of the century, illustrating the concept of the transience of life transposed in this collage by the presence of the travel glass.

Marcel Iancu also used (at the same dadaist period) any useless object, these *objets trouvés* representing the “substance” of his assemblages – *Construction* no. 3, 1917, being a mixture of various materials such as wire, yarn thread, fragments of pottery, plaster and so on. The fact that they still exist demonstrate their durability, but the artists of those times counted on their disintegration more than on preserving and exposing them in museums as happens today.

The New York group of the Dada movement is represented by two great names of the XXth century art: Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray.

Marcel Duchamp is the one who revolutionized the artistic means and techniques by inventing the ready-made. Through the ready-made, Marcel Duchamp brought criticism to manual and “retinal” artwork, canceling, it attacking it. The ready-mades are actually common objects which acquire aesthetic value by the simple selection of the artist, metamorphosing them, sacralizing them (mediation.centrepompidou.fr, 2004).

In 1913 was created the first *ready-made*, *Bicycle wheel* (the original was lost, but there is still a version the author made in 1951): “In 1913 I had the happy idea of placing a bicycle wheel on a kitchen chair and watched it spins” (Richter, *op. cit.*).

After that follows an entire series of *ready-mades* created both of singular objects, and of commercial images (advertisements, postcards, posters) that he “adorned” with other small objects obtaining those “helped ready-mades” as Marcel Duchamp called them. Therefore, in 1914, he bought a reproduction depicting an evening winter landscape to which adds two pharmaceutical pills – one red and one yellow – on the horizon line, naming the work *Pharmacy*.

In 1915, Marcel Duchamp “chooses” a snow shovel writing on its tail the phrase “anticipating wrist fracture”. This process of “subjectivating” the objects thrown or purchased in small shops of household products, continue with the creation of two of the most famous works by Marcel Duchamp: *Bottle Dryer* (or *Bottle Rack*) and *The Fountain* (*The Urinal*). The rejection to exhibit *The Fountain* received from the committee of the Society of Independent Artists demonstrates that the famous *Salon des Independants* does not honor the status of aspiring social recognition. Photographed at Alfred Stieglitz’s studio in front of the canvas of American painter Marsden Hartley, *The Fountain* achieves an “almost” official status as an object with artistic



value and the “R. Mutt case” being hotly debated by the press. This work will be the *piece de resistance* in most of his exhibitions, Marcel Duchamp later gave another functionality by arranging a bouquet of flowers inside.

In 1919, Marcel Duchamp created for his American friend, collector Walter Arensberg, another ready-made entitled *Paris Air (Air de Paris)*:

I was in Paris at that time and was looking for something I could bring as a gift to Arensberg in California, so I went to the pharmacy and asked <Can you give me a vial (ampoule) but devoid of its serum, to seal it back and what it contains to be the air of Paris, Air de Paris!> The pharmacist has made it and I brought my gift of Arensberg in California, giving it the title *Fifty cubic centimeters of Paris air* (Dachy, *op. cit.*).

Together with Arensberg created *A secret noise*, 1917, an object formed by two brass plates that could be screwed one into another, catching a ball of yarn in the middle. Arensberg put something in the ball of thread without telling Marcel Duchamp, so that after screwing, when stirred, the object emitted an interior noise.

Regarding the „helped ready-mades”, most famous work is, without any doubt, *LHOOQ /Mona Lisa with moustache*, 1919, Duchamp decides to draw a curled mustache and a go-tee on the da Vinci’s portrait of Gioconda, following the satirical spirit of Dada artists. Hans Richter, in his volume about Dada art, explains the definition of this type of *ready-made* by a quote by Marcel Duchamp: “Since color tubes are manufactured and ready-made produced, we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are ‘helped ready –mades’”.

Creating the ready-mades, Marcel Duchamp emphasizes the antinomy between art and the uniqueness of *ready-made* technique: “take a painting by Rembrandt and instead of contemplating it simply use it as an ironing board. Iron the clothes over it and so it becomes a reciprocal *ready-made*” (Dachy, *op. cit.*).

*Air de Paris* is the last one of the *ready-mades*, Marcel Duchamp setting aside this technique for a long period of time, and it was only after 1940 when he recreated *ready-mades* when he “composed” *Box in a Suitcase/ La Boîte en Valise*. This work is, actually, a portable museum of all Duchamp’s *ready-mades*, containing small replicas of those, the artist initially creating a “de luxe” edition of the suitcase in 20 copies. This work is an artistic resume of Marcel Duchamp’s life, elaborated carefully and sacredly towards the ephemeral legacy of the materials used.

Flirting with Surrealism between 1935–1945, Marcel Duchamp conceived an assemblage – installation for The International Exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1938. Salvador Dali was also there, present

with a work in the same technique: the visitors were greeted at the entrance of the exhibition with the assemblage entitled *Rainy Taxi*, 1938, which was actually a taxi car with holes in the ceiling and filled with rainwater and inside with mannequins and living snails. Inside the gallery, Marcel Duchamp lays on the pavement a thick layer of dry leaves and 4 beds, one of them being situated near a water pool and hundreds of charcoal bags were hanging from the ceiling. The only light source was a lamp used by mine workers. Visitors were given flashlights to help them see something.

Over the last 20 years of his life (the end of the '40 until 1968 when he died), Marcel Duchamp created his last major work, which remained, unfortunately, unfinished: *Given/ Étant donnés* composed of two parts *The Waterfall* and *The Illuminating Gas*. This work provides, through two small holes in a wooden door, the image of the “enigma” Marcel Duchamp and also of that series of *Boxes/ Suitcases* in which he presents the most important of his works, a sort of mini-museums to promote his creations.

Man Ray – painter, photographer, film maker – also stands up by the numerous technical innovations that he arrived at completion in various mediums. His association with Duchamp is obvious in the creation of *ready-mades*, but as some of the works of Marcel Duchamp were made simply by their de-contextualization (*Bottle Dryer*, *The Fountain*, *The Pharmacy*), Man Ray’s power of invention manifested itself by any possible technique in order to transform useful objects around him in things without any utility. Among the most famous are: *The Gift*, 1921 – an iron on the sole of which Ray stuck a row of spines, *Broadwalk* 1917 – which is a surface like a chessboard on which the artist adds a kind of buttons linked by pieces of string suggesting walkway routes, and not least *The Riddle or The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920, which is a photo assemblage. Suggesting the fact that Isidore Ducasse was hiding his identity under the name of *Count of Lotreamont*, this work was the climax of the transience of the artistic gesture in my opinion, and also the locking the concept of artistic product, ideas took further by well known land artist Christo. In this case, Man Ray hides an object (later he revealed that it was a sewing machine) under a cloth bag, closely tied with a string, which he would later destroy after having photographed it, perhaps in order to let enigma still alive and to play once again with the ambivalence and double meanings whose master was Isidore Ducasse. In 1920 dates the first *objet trouvé* entitled *The 8th Street* in memory of his birthplace: a can smashed by a car, but also the first “air sculpture” – *Obstruction* – made of wood hangers hung from each other.

In 1923 creates *Object to be destroyed* (which was even shot at in 1957 by the anti-dada protesters) which is, in fact, a metronome with a photograph of an eye attached to its swinging arm. Another innovation dates also in 1921 and represents a new photographic technique by exposing to light various objects laid on photographic paper conceiving the so-called “rayograms” in order to create surreal visions.

Another American, Joseph Cornell was noted for the concreteness of its surrealist objects. He created *The Box* as a storage system for different elements of the surrounding world (terrestrial and celestial maps, tubes, mirrors, clocks, cones, caps, wine glasses or small drawers with red sand) similar to the Insectarium for school. Remarkable is the object *The Egypt of Miss Cléo de Merode: elementary course of Natural History* created in 1940, which shows itself as an ancient and wonderful cosmetic box with small bottles stacked in the circular holes of the interior decorated with marbled wallpaper. Each container includes one attribute of Egypt: sand, wheat, rolls of paper called “Nile snakes”, pearls, and so on. *Celestial Navigation*, another work by Joseph Cornell, is a shadow box made of wood, plaster, painted earplugs, eyeglasses, metal, nails, paper collage, tempera and stained glass.

Salvador Dali’s work *The lobster Telephone* subscribes to the same tendency of achieving “strange”, “unreal” objects. Created in 1936, the phone has the receiver replaced by a painted plaster replica of a lobster.

*Bull’s head*, 1942, is one of the few *ready-mades* created by Pablo Picasso, in which he assembled the saddle and the handlebars of a bicycle in order to look like a head with horns, and later in 1945 he finds a burner stove whose shape correspond to his affinities to prehistoric goddesses of fertility, he placed it standing up, becoming *Venus Goddess of Gas*.

Strongly influenced by Max Ernst’s personality, Meret Oppenheim was one of the most important female artists of Surrealism. The most famous and, perhaps, the most durable of all is *Object/ Breakfast in fur*, 1936, artwork depicting a cup on a saucer with a spoon next to it, all covered with fur. The cult of the surrealists towards the object oscillates between extravagance and simplicity, between unreal and emphasized sexuality.

I left at the end the Constructivism simply because it had a short life (1916–1925) as an artistic movement in Russia, the artists continuing their works abroad. One of the targets of this movement was the creation of abstract sculptures for the industrialized society, pioneering the juxtaposing of materials such as wood, glass, plastic and steel, the first works of this kind were created by Vladimir Tatlin. As will be seen, the remaining elements after the end of Constructivism are many and they

strongly influenced other types of art and especially architecture, so that we can talk about sustainability both material and conceptual for this artistic and aesthetic current.

“The building is a modern concept. Art is a branch of mathematics, like all sciences. The building is the modern need for organization and use of materials. Constructivist life is the art of the future” (Art in Theory, 1992: 317)<sup>7</sup>.

Constructivists denied the mass and the volume of the sculpture as plastic elements and as space representation elements, preferring the principles of geometry and mechanics in achieving their work. The machines, as an inspiration source, were considered by the constructivists as something beautiful, elegant, simple and also complex, requiring great precision and perfect calculation. Seeking to express the pure reality, without any accidental intervention, the constructivists created “engineered” objects that do not exalt any strong feeling or any reference to literature. The constructivists created sculptural images of the new world of science, of industry, of mass production. The progress, the century of the speed mark them so much that they considered their works as a gesture of participating to a universal phenomenon.

The West met Constructivism through the works of Antoine Pevsner in Paris and Naum Gabo, his brother, in Germany. Together with the publication of the “Realistic Manifesto”, both artists supported the idea that art has a separate value and role from those of the state, and that the geometric principles represent the foundation of sculpture, the one in which the line describes the relationship between full and empty volumes (Bann S., 1974: 3). Outstanding in this respect are the works: *Model for “Column”*, 1920–1921, made of cellulose nitrate, *Construction in Space: Diagonal*, 1921–1925 (reassembled in 1986) made of glass, metal and celluloid, *Construction: Stone with collar*, 1933–1936, in which Gabo uses stone, cellulose acetate, slate and copper or *Construction in space with crystalline center*, 1938-1940, made of plexiglass and celluloid.

Vladimir Tatlin, the promoter of this movement, was influenced by Pablo Picasso after he visited him in 1913 and admired his reliefs created of sheet metal, wood and cardboard. Returning to his studio, Tatlin also created some constructions entitled “painted reliefs”. Profoundly interested in transforming the engineering machineries in sculpture, the artist receives, in 1919, the order to create a monument

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandr Rodchenko – “Slogans” and “Organizational Programme” of the Workshop for the Study of Painting in State Art Colleges.

which soon became his most famous work: *The Monument to the Third International*, for which he builds a project exhibited on the occasion of The Eighth Congress of Soviets in December 1920. With an altitude of 6,7 meters, the project was a spiral structure of iron meant to sustain a glass cylinder, a cone and a glass cube, each having the ability to be moved with variable speeds. The interior of the monument was supposed to contain lecture halls, conference rooms or for other activities, reaching a height of 396 meters, but the project remained at the design stage, caused by the Soviet government's refusal towards abstract art.

Alexandr Rodchenko abandoned the futuristic type painting in order to make three-dimensional constructions of wood, metal and other materials, using geometric shapes arranged in dynamic compositions. In fact, Alexander Rodchenko was the leader of the "productivist" group within Constructivism and his major interest was the closeness between art and industry, most of these works having mobility as a strong feature.

Futurists desired to launch the Man towards the new world of technology, for their aesthetic programme was a refusal of the artistic past. The same nihilism was taken over also by the Dadaists, who operated a fundamental change by abolishing the fixed and "unique" notion of work of art, transporting art in the midst of the surrounding reality, "infused" with the elements of technical and industrial progress. The art of this period (in all formal responses of the historical avant-garde) was manifested primarily as a gesture and as a creative process, being the reaction whose origins come from a social necessity full of contradictions. All these artistic transformations must be "read" in the context of some specific Spatio-temporal coordinates, allowing not only "the interpretation" but also their historicization.

Concluding, in the era of technical reproducibility, the work of art lost its cultural and traditional values together with its title of uniqueness, but won a new possibility, the one of expressing its significance using every day objects.

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