Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell

Herminio J. Rodriguez

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Rochester Institute of Technology
School of Photographic Arts and Science
Master in Fine Arts Program

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MFA Thesis
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Acknowledgment

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H.J.R.
To: Io (José Piñero Jiménez)
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Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell

"Inventions of philosophy are not less fantastic than those of arts"
Jorge Luis Borges

"No pretendo ningún copyright"
Julio Cortázar

The constant re-evaluation of methods of expression permits the re-organization of language, in which the word does not lose its original meaning. The re-evaluation of methods of expression is a necessity promoted by the evolution of language (doubt) in order to create certain coherence in the communication and in the message provided. The re-organization of language is a product of an evaluation of the evolutionary process of language. However, that re-evaluation, which begins as a doubt, enlarges the subject's final vocabulary, that vocabulary that hasn't begun to doubt; i.e. evolve. This means that the subject has a principal, "final", vocabulary, or sets of words to communicate a given idea. The evolution of language, and of vocabulary as well, permits the enlargement of the vocabulary by doubt. This doubt is in reference to other persons' vocabularies, texts, and methods of expression. The subject utilizes the product of the evolved vocabulary in order to create a communication between the speaker and the listener to whom the message is delivered. This interaction between speaker and listener is provided by the utilization of signs by the speaker (artist-writer) to seduce the spectator or listener,

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1 I'm not aspiring for any copyright. Rayuela (Hopscotch) (Catedra ed. Spain, 1994) p. 617.
2 In this essay all methods of expression or communication are encompassed by "Language", e.g. Literature and Art.
4 Ibid. p 74.
5 See Jean Baudrillard, Las Estrategias Fatales (Les stratégies Fatales) Translated to Spanish by Joaquín Jordá. (Anagrama ed. Barcelona, 1984). The seduction and sublimation through signs also, as Baudrillard explains, occurs in a sociological sphere
a specific one. In this case the speaker (artist) chose his/her listener who is provided with the necessary vocabulary to understand the message.

Neither this interaction, between speaker and listener, nor the seduction are limited to the area of books or speech but occurs in art as well. If there is a dialog between objects in a piece of art, by their significance and by what they symbolize, we should be able to call language that interaction. Artists use the word message to describe what they want to say in a piece of art. Message and say are words that obviously connote the use of a language. This theme traditionally used in writing is not new- nor is the inclusion of a theory of aesthetic in it. This new aesthetic is based in an act of mixing different artistic methods, languages and practices of representation that in the past were used for a specific aspect of art. Literature was just for the books and the hardware stores never were considered as an art supply. The use of this practice of grasping a different way of representation with unusual materials changed the methodology used by art and its language to understand, and to represent, an idea. Unusual signs make the seduction of the spectator more effective. The adoption and the mixing of all methods of representation, in which each object has its own meaning and signifier, permit the production of different kind of art work without engaging any kind of art style. The object never loses its identity even though it is used in other contexts- art promotes a disappearance of the concept of a specific and predominant style in art. It is not surprising that Duchamp was the one who began the idea of recontextualization of objects in art and the questioning of art's essence or from its foundation, including the utilization of a theory of language.

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and in advertisement as well. The enjoyment and the desire of a seduction and sublimation by the listener permits the existence of the simulacrum.

6 See Jean-François Lyotard, *La Posmodernidad explicada a los niños* (Le Posmoderne expliqué aux enfants). Translated by Enrique Lynch. (Gedisa ed., 1994) p. 23. Lyotard explained that the question to ask is not what is beautiful but what is art. Also he points out the freedom of multiple narratives that permits the inclusion of different aspects of knowledge in others, such as philosophy and art.
in art. Marcel Duchamp in 1912 with his Bike Wheel in a Stool and in 1917 with the Fountain using a pseudonym creates the readymades. Through the idea of what is a readymade Duchamp took objects of everyday life, traditionally not belonging to art, and juxtaposed them in a way in which the objects could represent, through a re-organization of their meanings, a conceptual idea in art. The objects used by Duchamp do not lose their meaning during their conceptual travel from everyday life to art. They keep their identity- Fountain still being an urinal- but through the epistemological re-organization of the objects the re-evaluation of the method of expression (language-i.e. art) takes place. In some cases Duchamp's idea didn't deal just with the work but with the author him/herself as he did with Rrose Selavy. This is how semiotics and its theory unify issues of the plastic arts and literature. There has been an epistemological destabilization of the object through literary theory and the use of semiotics.

In this text I will discuss how that constant re-evaluation and re-interpretation of language occurs as a sequence and, although it seems that each one mixes, they have their own referents in individual and cultural readings. For instance: in the 70's Roland Barthes referred to the death of the author, and previous to that Jorge Luis Borges attributed to another author the writing of Don Qijote using the writing style of fantastic literature as his tool. In the collaborative work between Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, they used common pseudonyms to not only make literature but to create an author with a fictitious life and prizes. And, as I said before, Duchamp "created" the readymade and Rrose Selavy. In this case I should

8The idea of the author does not only refer to Duchamp but also to Borges and Bioy Casares when both wrote the police stories using a pseudonym. Both cases will be discussed in the part referring to author's name as a piece of art and literature.
9I will take the word language, with its symbols and signs (semiotics) as a common denominator to describe all sorts of methods of expression: e.g. theoretical texts, plastic art, and literature.
take the theory of Barthes and complement it with the functionality of the author that Michel Foucault developed in his essay *What is an Author?*. Foucault describes the function of the author as what links the text and the reader—socially and historically. But this will be discussed later.

Those artists did not mix with their past but made a reference to it. Indeed, the reference to the past and the quest for an answer in the present does not mean that because the convergence of the previous idea and the new ones create another one. Each object and element in the work of art, and in the idea of each artist, does not change what they symbolize but works in a conceptual equation.\(^{10}\) This conceptual equation is what joins the issues of significance and symbolism of an object in a work of art with literature. In this sense, the referent and the reference (the object and what it means) work in a dialectical process to communicate an idea and transcend the idea itself. The Hegelian dialectics explained the constant historic reference in a work. This reference should be circular in a way that the object, although it represent something in the past, has repercussions in the present. The circularity or better the spiral form of the “equation” is necessarily to transcend to the next question or work or art. Using this process of re-evaluation and visiting, the work of art could be philosophical and the philosophical work could be artistic.

Another aspect of my attempt to not say anything new between art and philosophy\(^{11}\) is how art works in culture creating a path through its symbols. Art, when it is philosophical also changes the traditional cultural path already imposed to a new order over the older. Rationality and irony play an important role in this theme. Indeed, both methods and characteristics of language need to be handled separately and at the same time together. The rationality in art works as it does in

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\(^{10}\) Such as in an acts of permutation and mathematics.

\(^{11}\) Although my cynicism is not that adorable but goes pretty well with my second epigram. Indeed, nothing is new concerning this theme, Baudrillard in works such as *La transparence du mal* and *Les stratégies fatales*, and Lyotard in works such as *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, have written about that before.
religion, or at least similarly. For instance: primitive religions based their religions in ancestors and didn't look forward for any change because its tradition follows a rational scheme. However Modern religions, because of their modernity, are in constant change in their theories. My attempt here is to compare the theories of beliefs -traditional beliefs versus non traditional- with art before the twentieth century (traditional) and twentieth century art (non traditional). This theme will bring the issue of how art re-organizes its language when the pieces question the art itself and its tradition to imitate nature. This issue will be discussed in detail later. In art rationality works in constant reference to the past and the conceptual equation of the objects in the work of art. The work works if it makes reference to a cultural aspect through its elements. Then the understanding of the work comes from a previous experience and knowledge of the elements in rational relation with the past (empirical). Of course an empirical knowledge is important to the understanding of art that refers to previous events, cultural issues, and specific symbols. It is obvious, as well, that a misunderstanding of the work of art is possible if the work is presented in other cultures. Other cultures have their own conceptual and symbolic equation to play. In this case the decontextualization of the work and its misunderstanding could promote rejection in one side or a sense of commodification in another. That rationality in relation to previous referents to communicate an idea is what Richard Rorty calls irony in his book Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. The doubt- and it should be a rational one, towards the personal final vocabulary permits and allows the appropriation of previous "words" or final vocabularies to make reference to

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13 Ibid. p. 139.
15 In my case are objects too.
that referent in the present as just a text. "...take the words which are fundamental to metaphysics... as just another text, just another set of little human things."¹⁶

In order to have that rationality, a kind of commodification in the re-valuing of the object in language is presupposed. In this action that I'm proposing, in which the piece of art by a semiotic equation could be treated as a speaking language, that there must be a transformation of the materiality of language into an abstract one. Marx clarified this aspect of commodification of the object when he assumed that an object loses its "purchase"¹⁷ on the "real" when it becomes commodity. The exchange of value between sign and materiality is something that contemporary art is aware of. Duchamp and Beuys were very aware of this exchange. The text of David Joselit **Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910-1941** will help to clarify how the symbolism of an object is re-evaluated through commodification.

However, art pieces made to avoid a relationship with the past could only be unsuccessful. But their elements carry their meanings and symbols to complement the understanding or the misunderstanding as well. This idea permits the artist to make pieces of work that are based, for example, in the idea of the non-communication. In this case the necessity to find objects that provide enough symbols to the paradoxical communication to complete the equation of the non-communication creates hyper-communication¹⁹ (communication that goes beyond communication itself through new symbols) that preserves communication inside the idea of non-communication. Therefore, the artist might find in language, his/her language (vocabulary) or in other language, signs and symbols that provide

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¹⁶Richard Rorty: p. 93
¹⁷I do not think that the currency value is a theme to deal with in this moment. Although I think it is important for the understanding of some symbolic reference of certain objects in specific work of art.
enough information to communicate an idea, a specific one. Those signs and symbols may be related to the idea in order to provide a given message, in this example the message of non-communication. The symbols and signs may be recognized and may have been experienced in the past by the audience in order to understand the piece.

If the Artist in this time is aware of those theories and uses them to create the bridge between the piece and the spectator, use attempts to create what Roland Barthes in his book La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie called punctum. If or she is not far away from the creation of a language through objects and ideas. When the same artist raised philosophical and cultural issues in his/her work using different kinds of narratives and objects that weren't part of traditional art it is clear that the product could be made to raise issues that concern aesthetics and philosophy. Therefore, following those theoretical schemes, it is precise to conclude that in art, as in philosophy, the creation of a language through the diversity of narratives and the creation of different languages through their texts helps to connect those branches of knowledge to the point that to work in one is necessarily to follow the theory of the other. Philosophers and artists work from the same theories. This whole essay attempts to follow those ideas that I explained briefly in the introduction.

The Sacred Language

“The World goes beyond God”
Ellis Weistrong

The action of reading is one concerned intrinsically with language, no matter what kind- artistic, literary, scientific... The interesting thing is when all those

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20 Roland Barthes: Cámara lúcida: Nota Sobre la Fotografía. Translated to Spanish by Joaquim Sala-Sanahuja. (Paidos ed. Spain, 1990) p.63. It is necessarily raised the point that Barthes in the use of the word punctum is in reference to his own perspective and interpretation from a photograph. I'm not saying that the freedom that animates the theory of Hermeneutics is not valid but in contemporary art usually the work has one interpretation toward one kind of audience. Barthes' idea seems to be more universal, toward the interaction between object and the spectator, than to a specific punctum.
languages mix with each other to create different readings in the same text. Deconstruction pointed out in its theory of showing different kinds of texts\textsuperscript{21} that use in its content a variety of sources to represent and theorize one idea. The main point of this theory is to abolish the distance between the Text and the reader in order to engage the reader to the significance of the real text through their “own” readings. Roland Barthes pointed out this subject in his essay \textit{From Work to Text}.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed the deconstruction project, as I understand it, has some problems in its theory regarding the public and private space where its occurs, but this will be part of a discussion in the next part regarding Rorty’s irony, explained in a pragmatic account, in art. Barthes said that the text, to be a text, needs certain kinds of characteristics, such as the diversity of disciplines, as interdisciplinary in which each one overlaps each other. The language of each discipline works as the camouflage bridge that maintains the coherence in the Text and with art.\textsuperscript{23} Another characteristic is the goal of the \textit{piece}\textsuperscript{24} which is the reader or the spectator. In this case the pieces are preconceived for a specific audience that can understand the different languages that the \textit{piece} follows. Then the impotence of classification is obvious. If the piece (text) is built utilizing previous languages, in a circular reference (Hegelian Dialectics), the \textit{piece} can’t be classified and rejects any kind of hierarchy over other \textit{pieces}. But this doesn’t mean that the piece has no limits because it defies classification. Its ends are not in classification, and this non-classification is a

\textsuperscript{21}“Text” as the work which is separated from the writer and is not just committed with one “reading” or only one theme.

\textsuperscript{22}Roland Barthes \textit{Image Music Text} Translated by Stephen Heath (Hill and Wang, New York, 1977). Those points that I am clarifying are in a preceding essay, written by me (\textit{From Image Music Text and Labyrinth} to \textit{From work to text and Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius}) and are relevant to this discussion. However I will take this opportunity to add couples of thoughts that were not been clarify in that essay.

\textsuperscript{23}The characteristic of the text regarding the variety of disciplines and languages that Barthes talked about are intrinsically related with art.

\textsuperscript{24}I will use the word \textit{piece} as an universal word without making a distinction between text and the work of art. Using this denominator I’m exposing the idea of the text being a piece of art and a piece of art as a text using Barthes’ theory.
classification in itself. This paradoxical characteristic is what gives an apparent limit to the piece. Then, symbolism in the piece is the fact that separates the author or artist from the piece. This characteristic permits the piece to be conceived, perceived and received. Then the piece is exposed to different readings,- cultural and social- through its languages and objects. In this sense the piece goes beyond the artist or author. Now the piece is alone with the spectator who determines if he/she wants to join to the game -consume the product. To have any pleasure or jouissance there must be some kind of consumption relation. The spectator knows that, as much as he/she likes the piece he/she is not able to re-do it because of his/her modernity and the time and culture. The modernity in the spectator tries to avoid re-starting something again. The space/time issue and the plurality (stereographic characteristic) of the text engage the spectator to consume the text and avoid going back in time in the re-production of something that already existed. Also, although modernity permits and encourages changing- even allowing the reference to tradition, the return to the past is not permitted or conceivable. Then the piece works with the spectator as long as he/she knows the language. The text (piece) uses different languages that allow a stereographic plurality. This stereographic plurality of languages in the text (piece) is the result of different languages combined and re-organized -in a social relation between other texts and languages (previous)- in order to create a new text. The stereographic plurality means, that like photography, there are different texts and signifiers (photos) working together and, through a mental process (optics), is permitted a coherence of depth of texts in the new text (the same depth provide by a stereographic photo). This process of re-organization permits a circularity of texts in the space provided in the new text.

25 Barthes Image Music Text, p. 158. Also Baudrillard in his books La transparence du mal and Les stratégies Fatales touches this theme a little bit more pessimistically.
26 Ibid. p. 159.
27 Kuame Anthony Appiah: In my Father's House, p. 129.
28 Roland Barthes: Image Music Text, p. 159
"The Text (piece) achieves, if not the transparent of the social relation, that at least of language relation: the Text (piece) is that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate (keeping the circular sense of the term)". 29

That circular characteristic that Barthes refers to is not other than a re-organization of one language in the construction of another. It is clear that the languages that were used to build the new one do not lose their meaning (Barthes was aware of that) but the act of a creation of a new language permits the re-evaluation of the older languages. Duchamp in the beginning of the twentieth century was aware of that. In his writings regarding readymades he explains that the creation of them "...was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anesthesia"30 The idea of anesthesia is, for Duchamp, the main step in what I call the re-organization of the method of expression through a specific language. Also the "reaction of visual indifference" presupposes a new aesthetic and, indeed, a new language- or in Barthes' theory, a text.

As an example, it will be helpful to discuss Duchamp's explanation of a certain readymade: "In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote In Advance of The Broken Arm."31 Taking that explanation of how he did that readymade, it is easy to understand when the artist is trying to communicate; first: art as an institution functions in the concept and in the idea; second: the utilization of non-traditional materials in art to question the idea of art and make art.- This includes the use of other languages in the domain of a specific language (art) to re-organize the traditional language; Third: the utilization of the object with its own meaning and using the Text as a metaphor for the concept of the object, i n

29Ibid. p. 164.
31Ibid. p. 141.
which the object and the text make the conceptual connection between the piece and the spectator; And fourth: the aspect of time "a snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour. It is a kind of rendezvous." 32 The rendezvous in between the piece and the artist who made the snapshot in the inscribing of the time and the text, which occurs in the "present". The spectator, then, experiences in the piece the past such as when he/she looks at a photograph.33 The object still being a shovel, the text refers to the possible action with the object, and then the conceptual connection between the object and the history of art; conceived, perceived, and received. The shovel is conceived, by the spectator, as a shovel. The spectator perceived the idea of the inscription (that work as a text, even though the perception of the piece comes in the received.) And then the spectator receives the message of the piece.

I can conclude, about this issue, that the readymade was, and probably still is34 the paradigm of the "decomposition"35 of the style, which is in the sphere of postmodernism, the abolition of different narratives: "The work (in this case Duchamp's readymade) he (the artist) produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a predetermined judgment (kind of anesthesia), by applying familiar categories to the work (piece)". 36 That "decomposition" in reference to experiment with other options within a style could be described as a re-organization of that style. The paradigm is Nude Descending a Staircase, in which cubism is mixed with the technique of movement

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33 Barthes in La chambre claire compares the idea of a rendezvous as a rendezvous with the past; i.e. Death concerning photography.
34 Duchamp was ahead of his time
35 Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., The Writings of Marcel Duchamp, p 124.
36 Jean François Lyotard, La Posmodernidad Explicada a los Niños, p. 25. It is no surprise that contemporary philosophy is based in what Duchamp did. Lyotard said that when the piece is not governed by a pre-established rule, this works as well as philosophy. Something that I certainly agree with, however, is that the pre-established rules are necessary to break them.
photographs such as the experiments of Muybridge and the drawings of the Futurists. Of course it seems that I'm decontextualizing Duchamp from his time, but the circular reference mentioned by Barthes always brings the idea of the absence of rules in the juxtaposition with others including the cultural meaning of the materials used by the artist. The shovel is still a shovel and the text, though a painful one, a text. Both retain their meaning to create, without any changes, symbols of pain. Therefore the "Duchampian decomposition" is nothing other than the composition of symbols and signs in a determined language. This, therefore, approaches the issues of language and the plastic arts through an epistemological transformation of the object.

The Quest for the Name of God

However, descriptions such as Duchampian or Lo Borgiano refer to someone who wrote or did the work—the author. Barthes in his essay The Death of the Author proposed the idea of disconnection from the origins of the author's voice to let the text survive from the author through linguistic means. The neutrality of writing permits the person (in this case what used to be called the author) slip out from the text. His/her voice does not live in reality. In this moment "writing begins". This disconnection is provided (again) by the introduction of symbols and signs. This issue of the use of signs and symbols is where writing freed itself from the dimension of expression. Michel Foucault explained this issue more clearly in his essay What is an Author?:

"Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own

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37 This is how in Spanish refers to Borges' style.
39 Ibid. p. 142.
unfolded exteriority. This means that it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits.\textsuperscript{40}

Writing, then, is a question of creating a space in which the writing subject constantly disappears, through the utilization of signs and symbols.

Through those two common denominators, as in literature as in art, the language speaks. Barthes added that: "...it is language which speaks, not the author; to write (or do a piece of art) is, through a prerequisite impersonality, to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'".\textsuperscript{41} There are two important subjects in this quote that should be mentioned: The performative characteristic of the text, and the suppressing of the author in the interest of the reader.

I should begin with the "performance". To say that the text\textsuperscript{42} performs refers to how the text transcends the ownership of the author to perform in its own act—the inscription in the multi-dimensional space. I already explained that the voice is deleted by language. But it is in the gesture of inscription where language takes its position toward the text. Here the text is ruled by the language itself. The inscriptor, writer and artist reject the time/space relationship between performer and performance, and propose a question of the originality of the text—Duchamp with the readymades, and Cortázar with Hopscotch. Then after raising the point of originality, the multi-dimensional space of the text "in which a variety of writing blend and clash"\textsuperscript{43} introduces the issue of appropriation of different texts or, in art, different methods of expression. This "blending and clashing" refers to the diversity of previous texts on which the text was shaped—the eternal reference or quotation; APPROPRIATION. This does not eliminate the originality of language at all. The

\textsuperscript{40}Michel Foucault, \textit{What is an author?}, \textit{The Foucault Reader}, ed. by Paul Rabinow (Pantheon Books, New York, 1984)p. 102 should be important to make clear again that the act of writing easily could be compared with the creation of the piece of art.

\textsuperscript{41}Roland Barthes, \textit{Image Music Text}, p. 143.

\textsuperscript{42}In this work the word "text" refers to art pieces and literature.

\textsuperscript{43}Roland Barthes, \textit{Image Music Text}, p. 146.
inclusion of all the multi-cultural-historic-empiric (previous texts and pieces too) knowledge of the inscriptor or artist is the basis of language. This may sound paradoxical, but the originality of the text is based not in doing something new out of the blue, but with the old to create that new piece. The urinal of Duchamp was not a new object, but blended into the narrative and the concept of art, he certainly created an original. The urinal existed before it was chosen by Duchamp, but certainly the conception of the piece and "gesture of inscription" of R. Mutt 1917 are what limit the relation Duchamp/Fountain as Duchamp as an author (concept) to an inscriptor that is "born" with the piece. Then Fountain survives on its own as a piece of art (text language). This does not mean that Duchamp as an artist is not important. The functionality of the author will be discussed ahead.

The second aspect is the suppressing of the author in the interest of the reader. This idea is the key one in understanding why languages, not only make the author disappear but also how they eliminate his/her individuality as a writer. The so called author found his own death when he finds him/herself as a reader and thinking as one. The artist is none other than the spectator. Through methods of expression and research such as quoting or the mixing of quotes, imitation, appropriation, blends, clash, performs it is impossible to think in terms of "who wrote it?" but "who read it?" and "what was read?". It is impossible also to think about Duchamp the artist regarding his last piece Etant donnés without thinking about Duchamp the spectator or the Curieux. The same happens with Cortázar in Hopscotch when he gives you two different ways of reading the novel or with the Dictionary of the Khazars in which Milorad Pavić let you know that there is not a single, correct way to read the book. Both writers assumed the position of the reader in their creation. Also to argue in philosophy is to position the philosopher in the position of the reader. Of course the previous reading that each artists did before and

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44 The curious one
during the creation of the piece in order to create or re-organize a language is to assume the perspective of the reader or spectator. This means that the artist or writer to be as such needs to assume a humble position (reader or spectator) within language to re-organize the language itself. Those issues concerning the author among the texts or the pieces of art as well are what makes language, as an entity, are the links in which both (art and literature [philosophy]) complement each other.

Those issues that I explained before do not mean that the author disappears at all because language, writing and pieces of art, freed themselves from the dimension of expression. The author survives in the context of his/her functionality. We cannot reject Duchamp or Borges because their pieces are sustained by themselves. The functionality of the author, as Michel Foucault explained in his essay What is an Author? begins with the argument about the "proper name" of the author. It has a functionality, not as an individual but in relation to the work. This is not to say that the author's name is a simple element in a discourse, "it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function."\[^{45}\] This permits us to group under a certain author's name a certain number of texts in which the author established a relationship among the texts that he/she used. This is what "resuscitates" the author as a reader without leaving his/her position as creator. This is to say, mathematically, Duchamp = readymades, Borges = labyrinths. It is obvious that this raises the issue of status not just of the text but the author in society as well.

However, to say that the author "resuscitates" because the name refers to a specific discourse in time and society is to not complete the circular characteristic of the function of the author. Foucault gave us four characteristics of the discourse that contains the author function. The first characteristic is that "discourses are objects of appropriation."\[^{46}\] This means that all discourses are built in reference to previous

\[^{45}\]Michel Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p. 107.  
\[^{46}\]Ibid. p. 108.
discourses. Again (as was discussed before when we dealt with Barthes) originality is not in danger because the judicial and institutional system (literature or art) that provides the right to argue, allows the correction and "rediscovering the old bipolar field of discourse, systematically practicing transgression and thereby restoring danger to a writing which was now guaranteed the benefits of ownership."[47]

Therefore, appropriation permits the author to redefine his/her own discourse based on others. Borges in Pierre Menard the Author of Don Quixote creates a text based in an existent one without losing originality.

The second characteristic is that the author function does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization. This means that the author function evolves through time in a such way that in ancient literature, anonymity was permitted. However, in our civilization that is intolerable because literary discourses came to be accepted when endowed with the author's function. Otherwise anonymity could be accepted as an enigma or another text. This interesting characteristic permits us to discuss the related subject of pseudonyms. Because neither in literature nor art is anonymity acceptable, artists such as Duchamp, and writers such as Borges and Bioy Casares, dealt with this idea of attributing a piece to an author to create a new text. This means that the artist or the writer takes the author function to create another text in the text- Fountain by R. Mutt and Chronicles of Bustos Domecq by Borges and Bioy Casares as a collaboration. The result is another text because they are creating a discourse of ownership from the origins of the argument, "who is an author?" In Duchamp's case Richard Mutt is the linguistic mix of Richard that in French means "rich" (riche) and Mutt in reference not to the comic strip Mutt and Jeff but as the owner of the company where the urinal was built, J. L. Mott Iron Works.[48] This follows the epistemological

[48]William A. Camfield, Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: History and Aesthetics in the Context
game that Duchamp used to play with language in his art. However this piece created an enigma in the art world in 1917 raising the question of the nature of art and the legitimization of the piece of art through the author. When the American Society of Independent Artists called for pieces for a show in 1917 there was no "requirement for admission but the piece of art and the initiation fee of one dollar and the annual dues of five dollars." When Fountain was submitted, it was immediately rejected, after which Marcel Duchamp resigned his position in the Society. Duchamp resigned because the Society did not follow their principles and because they did not know the intention of the artist. The moral issue was because they could not conceive the recontextualization of the object as an independent piece in a gallery, although they considered Duchamp's other readymades as art but as a whole and not as separate pieces. The issue of authorship, the one that I am more interested in now: relates to an apparent and close reference to the character of the comicstrip, Mutt. Therefore the piece could not be taken as seriously as it deserved. This will raise the issue of enigma of the author, which Foucault mentioned, and the cultural symbolism of rejecting the work of art not because of the work itself but because of the authorship. In this case the author has the same characteristics as the piece regarding the creation of language through the author's name, therefore in the functionality of the author, in art.

In literature Chronicles of Bustos Domecq, a collaborative work between Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares raised the issue of the author and its functionality. Borges and Bioy created not only the author, Bustos Domecq, but the
one who wrote the foreword, Gervasio Montenegro, and the literature society to which Montenegro belongs, *The Argentine Academy of Letters*. This book is an anthology of ironic essays that were published in Argentina, in which the "author" discusses subjects raised from the life of an author who did not exist (*Homage to César Paladión*) to reviews of architecture that is impossible to build (*The Flowering of an Art*). In those two examples it is easy to see Foucault's point regarding anonymity that "we can accept it in the guise of an enigma"\(^{53}\). The apparent author, Domecq, not only creates another author in the case of *César Paladión*, but mentions Paladión in other texts as a friend of Montenegro, who wrote the foreword. In this case the "enigma" keeps growing as its own enigmatic characteristic as a text, not only in the first pseudonym, Domecq, but in the second, Montenegro, and the third, Paladión, without forgetting the text that described the friendship between the second and the third and therefore with the first. Therefore, in Borges' and Bioy's text the creation of a certain consistency in a text allows the enigma to surpass its enigmatic characteristic to become something that could be considered as true with the utilization of the specific language or intellectual journalism. In conclusion, Duchamp, Borges and Bioy created pieces of art or literature in the pseudonyms that they created; *R. Mutt* and *Bustos Domecq*.

Another important point that Foucault raised as a characteristic of some authors is what he called the "transdiscursive". This characteristic refers to authors who create a discourse "in which other books and author will in their turn find a place."\(^{54}\) Those authors are the ones who write more than a book; they write theories, traditions, or disciplines. Foucault is somewhat narrow on this topic. He referred to a discourse as something that is written: "Certainly the author function in painting, music, and other arts should have been discussed, but even supposing that we remain

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\(^{53}\)Michel Foucault *The Foucault Reader* p. 110

\(^{54}\)Ibid. p. 113
with the world of discourse...I seem to have given the term "author" much too narrow a meaning." It is clear and obvious that Foucault has given the term author too narrow a meaning, but he has similarly restricted the meaning of the "world of discourse". To say that the "world of discourse" just belongs to written practice is to reject what artists such as Duchamp, Beuys, and Warhol, who could also be "founders of discoursivity" and "have established an endless possibility of discourse". Those artists (and I will appropriate from Foucault discourse) "have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other" art pieces. In this term the so called "transdiscursive" not only takes place in a written language but in art as well -of course if we consider art as language.

If we consider that art works through a specific language, we can consider Foucault's text as a source to explain how "transdiscoursivity" works. "Founders of discoursivity" make possible not only a certain number of analogies but also differences. "They have created a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded." To say that Duchamp founded the readymade does not mean that we find the concept of Fountain or In Advance of the Broken Arm in the works of Chris Burden or Charles Ray; it means that Duchamp made possible a certain number of divergences that all arise from the discourse of the readymade itself. This means that the transformation of a foundation becomes part of a modification in the concept of new art pieces via discursivity. The modification in the field of discoursivity only works if there is a return of the origins or its foundation. This does not mean that "the return to the origins" is necessarily to make an obvious or literal reference to the foundation in the art piece.

55 Ibid. p. 113
56 Ibid. p. 114
57 I will use Foucault phrase in reference not to Marx or Freud, as he did, but to Duchamp and Warhol.
58 Michel Foucault p. 114
On the other hand, "the return of the origins" deals only with the modification of the foundation, not with the final concept of the new art piece. This means that the piece of art always has elements that were modified from the founders of discursivity's idea to reexamine the foundation itself. In this sense pieces of art such as Rauschenberg's re-examine the discourse of the readymade.

When the Urinal and the Shrine Danced

After the explanation of how art works into the discourse following the rules of written language I should raise the discussion concerning commodification as the common denominator in the re-organization of language, i.e. the creation of a language through and in art and literature. It is obvious that terms that were explained before reappear here: Jouissance, consumption and seduction. For this explanation it will be important to begin the discussion with Marx:

"Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will."{59}

If Marx has known about Fountain, he may not have used the example of a table. However Marx raised a few things that are important to this essay: 1. the transcendental aspect of the commodity, 2. the exchange of value that involves and promotes that commodity and 3. comfort. This last aspect of commodity (comfort) arises from linguistic issue that concern Latin, in which the word commodity has different meanings, involving status, accommodation, and physical comfort.

I should begin in order. The transcendental characteristic of the commodity involves the semionization of the object. The object loses its materiality through its definition in language; its presence in a metaphysical sense. Then the definition is enlarged by other definitions or signs that are imposed by culture, or in Duchamp's epistemological game of abstraction. In this transcendental process the materiality of the object is less important than what this object represents, symbolizes or in what context it is presented. Therefore the commodification of an object, transcendentally, happens only in the domain and in the space of definition and symbolism. The object does not lose its materiality. The object is present, but transcends in a semiotic space with the help of other components or objects that promote a new symbol or meaning; the object becomes a commodity. This commodification happens more in the art world where the objects are constantly re-contextualized and re-defined in order to succeed in the presentation of a message. Artists, like writers, use the commodification of words and objects to create in the work some kind of seduction, to engage the audience to understand the work. After the audience has been seduced (and this seduction occurs in relation to new symbols and the audience) the value of the object is built, not through the artist as a commodifier but through the audience itself as a buyer of the idea -and, at the end, the piece or the books.

The second issue that Marx raises is the exchange of value that the commodity involves and promotes. First, it would be better if we define what value involves: something dissimilar can be exchanged for the item whose value is under consideration, and similar things can be compared with the item whose value is under consideration.60 Probably this could be understood in a market sphere. However, in language as in art, it could be understood through the utilization of signs in relation to objects. Dissimilar objects can be exchanged for another object

60David Joselit, Infinite Regress. p. 35
whose signs are under consideration to symbolize the object that will adopt the new meaning. Or similar objects could be compared to the symbolism that is under consideration to the comparison. In this case the first refers to objects, which lost their metaphysical essence in a semiotic transition, and exchange through commodity their significance or what they symbolize. In the second sense, the objects which are similar compare their significance and what they symbolize. In this sense the difference is between the exchange and the comparison. In art the exchange occurs in the appropriation of an object and in the exchange, in a process of contextualization or recontextualization, of the functionality of the object among the symbolism of other objects. In the second case the objects are similar and share some signs and symbols. In this case, the artist wants to compare the significance of both objects in discussion. To exchange and to compare, then, depends on how the objects will be utilized in their commodification. This issue of value is important to understand in relation to how the audience, who carries all the cultural baggage, reacts to the piece and its symbolism. This means that in issues of values in language the signs and symbols could be exchanged or compared using a method that traditionally adjusts better to the marketplace. However it should not be forgotten that art, like language, also flows in a market ruled by commodities.

It is time now to begin with the discussion about comfort in relation to commodity. First, it will be better to start the issue by clarifying a linguistic fact. This will explain also why I chose the word "comfort" to talk about social and physical status in the commodity (comfortable). In Spanish\textsuperscript{61}, as also in French, there is a word that means "comfort": \textit{comodidad}. (It should be clear, now, where this discussion is going.) The word \textit{comodidad} means both comfort, in a physical way, and commodity, in the enjoyment of the status quo. Its definition can depend just upon

\textsuperscript{61}Spanish is my first language and I'm proud of it. Also this will clarify some linguistic and cultural problems that English language has.
the context in which the words are used. Those two definitions are not very far away from each other. After the process of commodification of the object by the artist, in which the seduction and Juissance of the piece takes an important role in the relation between piece and spectator, the process of commodification is "improved". The object is commodified again by society. Therefore, the piece is re-commodified by society or just individuals to satisfy personal enjoyment and social status-Commodity and Comfort.

The pleasure that commodity offers to the spectator is produced by the pleasure of consumption- the impossibility of re-doing the piece. This pleasure promotes the commodity and comfort. The pleasure of consumption in commodity is developed through the impossibility to re-doing the piece because the piece (object) ended in its own originality and in the author's "ownership". Those two factors promote the re-commodification and the valuing of the piece by the spectator. The signs and symbols that the piece carries are not limited to those the artist wanted to use but also includes the social interpretation of the piece, what it represents, and who did it. Indeed, the pleasure that those two factors offer are those which promote the spectator to buy the piece to satisfy his/her desire for "upgrading" in the status quo. This is what clarifies the issue concerning pleasure in the process of commodification.

However, pleasure does not just stop in the sphere of the status quo; it transcends to another space, the physical enjoyment. After the piece is acquired (by social means and value -dollars) and the social status pleasure was satisfied, in relation to what the piece represents in society and in the history of the medium in

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62 This improvement is in relation of the commodification process of the artist. The piece goes through the same process of commodification but rather through the artist through the spectator.
63 Barthes in From Work to Text discuss the same example with writing.
which the piece belongs, the piece is, then, taken to a place in which the owner will enjoy the piece in a physical way—visual or tangible. The buyer will feel and will have the opportunity to re-enjoy the piece as many times as he/she wants because, after all, the piece was bought also to satisfy that physical pleasure and enjoyment. For example, a person buys a Mapplethorpe\textsuperscript{64} and installs the photo in his/her living room. The first reason to buy a masterpiece of 1980's art is what it represents culturally—all the issues that Mapplethorpe's work "produced" concerning censorship in art (which is, in a certain sense, an issue of value and therefore commodification.)—and probably the second reason is because the image is a "classic" in the history of Mapplethorpe's career. But if the image is not a classic it is at least a Mapplethorpe. Then the buyer, after satisfying his/her social enjoyment in the field of the market takes the piece to home and installs it, as I said, in the living room, in that personal and comfortable space in which he/she can physically (visually) enjoy the work. This space, the living room, would be that space where that person also enjoys reading Grisham or another author that is in vogue in the literature market currently. In this space different kind of pleasures and desires that were product of a process of commodification are satisfied. This means that commodification, although it is a process that belongs to an abstract concept, meaning that it does not necessarily need a physical action to succeed, could not be separated from the physical pleasure that the piece offers. That is why, in the Latin derived languages, the same word is used for both definitions—\textit{Comodidad} or \textit{Comodité}.

\textsuperscript{64}Notice that I'm using the same language of commodification to refer to the piece of art. Is not to say, for example, \textit{Self-portrait}, it is to say that does not matter what the photo is but is to say that the authorship (Foucault) has enough power in commodification that the name of the piece could be avoided to satisfy that social status that some people look for.
God and the Ironist

Now the question to raise is how a piece, that constantly refers to a previous language in the context of art in order to create another, is comprehended and works through the re-organization of the language in time. The clue, I think, to that question deals with the idea of the rationality of the narrative of the work and the role of artist as an ironist.

Art, in a general sense and without any boundary, changes its style through time. The issue is how art survives in a modern society, Western, that is characterized by change. To answer that question is precisely to compare religious beliefs with art to define the survival of art. Of course then it is also necessarily to separate traditional beliefs and non-traditional and separate art before the twentieth century and twentieth century art. Traditional beliefs, as Kuame Anthony Appiah explained, are based in symbolism that works through a process of rationality. That rationality, and its intrinsic characteristic of conviction, permits the acceptance without any doubt about the beliefs. Pre-twentieth century art suffers the same ill; the representation of nature and beliefs. Also, even though the technology changed, the vocabulary never changed. The tradition and the rationalism that were carried by the tradition avoided any kind of revolution in art. Also because the tradition works with symbols, that are organized in a rational order, those symbols in order to represent and symbolize what they mean, need to be in the context to which the tradition assigns them. For example, the paint belongs to the canvas and the walls

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65The history of art is intimately related with the history of beliefs. It should not be a surprise that I use one to define the other.
66Although Appiah based his studies in African society, his definition fits very well to the goal of this essay.
68Revolution in this case is not to be too political, even though it is always necessary. It also refers to the circularity that the dialectics fosters.
and sculpture to the pedestal or the garden. In this case, the tradition survives through time because of a consistency in a narrative or a language. The language was the same and the symbols worked for one purpose.

However, non-traditional beliefs are not based in tradition but in a dogma, a fundament. All those series of rules that are part of a literary culture permits its constant re-evaluation through language. Contrary to traditional beliefs, with only an oral tradition that no one doubts and which permits accommodation toward the truth, non-traditional beliefs (and contemporary art as well) permits doubt of the beliefs for two reasons; individualism and intellectualism through literacy. Individualism, in religion as in art, leads the mind to ask for the benefits of the self and permits, in that sense, revision by a doubt what would be to his/her convenience. The concept of truth in the non traditional beliefs in art cannot survive because their logic is toward individualism and industrialization, and not in the beliefs or in the community. "Literacy, then, makes possible the "modern" image of knowledge as something that is constantly being remade; what drives the culture to take up this possibility is... the economic logic of modernity..." that is driven by the production of commodity. Pop Art is an example of the idea that knowledge is permitted to evaluate the culture (that was driven by banal economic principles) and art in order to doubt the preceding method and theories of expression. In this case Pop art was founded in the discourse of market economics and culture, adopting symbols of the popular culture as a language of expression for art making. But this does not mean that there is not rationality involved in the style. The lack of consistency and the constant re-evaluation of the theory threatens the survival of the style and, indeed, its rationality.

69 Kuame Anthony Appiah, In my Father's House, p. 131.
70 Ibid. p. 133.
Also this lack of rationality, common sense, and consistency in non-traditional beliefs and art—when affected by economic and cultural factors like commodities allows the decontextualization of the work. A traditional work of art could be affected by decontextualization and the filter of the re-organization of the language and industrial culture if the art belonged to another culture. Different cultures manipulate other narratives (in the sense of laws and styles of different kinds of art) to their own benefit. This accommodation permits the misreading of the aesthetic value—the language—of the work. Now the language of reading is different from the language in which the piece was built. In this case pluralism takes precedence over any given vocabulary. The vocabulary or language becomes fragile and weak when it is involved in different cultures. This is just another aspect of how language and vocabulary change in the sphere of industrial and modern (contemporary) society, because they are in constant re-evaluation.

As I already explained, the re-evaluation of the narrative occurs with a doubt of the artist, and the philosopher, in order to create a piece. This presupposes that rather than one vocabulary, as metaphysics says, there are multiples, individual and different (to be redundant is necessary in this case) vocabularies depending upon culture and beliefs. The pieces come into existence when people think up alternatives which have not been envisaged before and thereby question a commonsensical belief which there had previously been no reason to doubt. This doubt is the word to aim in the relation of the re-organization of the language. Rorty is the theorist who portrayed and brought doubt into philosophy and art through the ironist. In this case I shall call every artist or philosopher: (the one who follows

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71 Ibid. p. 138.
72 Richard Rorty, Deconstruction and Circumversion, p. 88. What this means is that philosophical problems and art pieces are not out there waiting to be found but rather made.
these theories, and which at the end of this essay will be the same) an ironist.\textsuperscript{73} The ironist, according to Rorty, shall fill three major characteristics: 1. The ironist has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary the ironist uses, because he/she has been impressed by other final vocabularies found in other people and books. 2. The ironist realizes that an argument phrased in his/her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts. And 3. at the time the ironist philosophizes about his/her situation, he/she doesn't think that his/her vocabulary is closer to reality than others.\textsuperscript{74} This explanation goes against the metaphysicians who assume that the presence of a term in his/her (metaphysics) own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which has a real essence.\textsuperscript{75} The ironist is worried more about how the language has been used rather than finding any truth -by correspondence to reality.

Related to art, the ironist views a sequence of styles and theories as gradual tactics of substitutions of a new vocabulary for an old one, rather than to a convergence on one true or final destination. In this aspect, the vocabulary, old and new, are interrelated in a sequence in the re-organization without converging in a system of mixing. For the ironist the different sort of vocabularies work individually in the making of a new one without losing their own characteristic in the piece. Here we could find the different readings to which I was referring in the discussion concerning Barthes. However the metaphysician works, as in the context of traditional beliefs in which common sense and an apparent rationality in the final vocabulary ensures the converges of theory and reality, in order to build one closed vocabulary.\textsuperscript{76} In the organization of disciplines in art, the ironist sees the disciplines as divided according to tradition, in which each member of the discipline partially

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73}Contrary to Rorty I'm not going to give gender to the ironist in order to be fair with all members of genders.
\item \textsuperscript{74}Richard Rorty, \textit{Contingency, Irony and Solidarity}, p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{75}Ibid. p. 74.
\item \textsuperscript{76}Richard Rorty, \textit{Deconstruction and Circumvention}, p.105
\end{itemize}
adopts and modifies the vocabulary of the artist whom they had seen or read; i.e. put everything in a dialectical mill; e.g. Homer, Cervantes, Wagner, Joyce, Borges, Barthes, Rorty. But this dialectic method is taken more as a way to persuade than to propose. The ironic method operates through re-description rather than inference.\textsuperscript{77} The action of re-description\textsuperscript{78} deals intrinsically with the search for possibilities and alternatives using other vocabularies. Borges couldn't write \textit{Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote} without first having been an ironist (a great one) and second, (of course) knowing Cervantes' piece so well that through persuasion in a new language he "enriched the halting and rudimentary art of reading..."\textsuperscript{79} Again the dialectic method of the ironist could be drawn through Cervantes, Göethe, Hegel, Balzac, Proust, Joyce. In contrast, the metaphysicians couldn't write Borges' piece because they probably thought that by that time Cervantes' "final vocabulary" would be obsolete. So the ironist, in this sense, consistently circumvents to other vocabularies, in a circular pattern.\textsuperscript{80}

Then the next step to becoming an ironist is the dilemma of being a liberal in a public and private space. The ironist, then, decides to re-describe his/her final vocabulary through intellectuality. Intellectuality gives irony the opportunity and the alternatives of different vocabularies.\textsuperscript{81} In this sense the ironist can go back and forth to his private alternative vocabularies, and to his/her public alternative vocabulary. "For my private purposes, I may re-describe you and everybody else in terms which have nothing to do with my attitude toward your actual or possible suffering. My private purposes, and the part of my final vocabulary which is not

\textsuperscript{77}Richard Rorty, \textit{Contingency, Irony and Solidarity}, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{78} The "-" is use in order to ensure graphically the prefix and to make a connection to the main them of the essay.


\textsuperscript{81}Richard Rorty, \textit{Contingency, Irony and Solidarity}, p. 92.
relevant to my public actions (my attitude toward your actual or possible suffering), are none of your business." Here it is obvious that the ironist looks for a sense of human solidarity in a sense of common danger and not in a common denominator or an organic structure between private and public. The "natural doubt" of the ironist does not let him/her engage in a public cause that doesn't represent something that he/she wants to pursue because of his/her private space. Then the liberal hope of the ironist is the possibility of not being engaged by a final vocabulary but being able to modify it with other final vocabularies and destroy the metaphysician's final vocabulary of the individual. Warhol was an ironist in the utilization of the re-description of art in pop culture. His own language and vocabulary was re-organized with the inclusion of the popular culture's vocabulary and art's conceptual vocabulary. Searching in this case for alternatives to private vocabulary on the idea of the readymade of Duchamp to, then, expose the public vocabulary to pop culture through Pop Art. Warhol also humiliated and attacked the fundamental idea of the metaphysicians -the search for an essence and truth- when he destroyed the market by its own value; i.e. its own final vocabulary.

As I said in the beginning, I don't say anything new, but draw an analogy between texts. All the different final vocabularies that I used in this essay have their own meaning in their context. Barthes in Literature, Appiah in African beliefs, Rorty in philosophy, and Marcel Duchamp in art. The re-definition of those texts helps to persuade the reader that in the act of re-organizing a language or a method of expression, such as art, one is also doing philosophy. The constant circular reference to another text or vocabulary or beliefs in a dialectical process permits the artist to participate in the intellectual frame and not just in a contemplative one. The

82 Ibid. p. 91
83 Here we can discern some kind of paradox in the metaphysician's rhetorical practice that promotes individualism but rejects and prohibits doubt of the final vocabulary.
artist should make *pieces* that do not follow those ideas, but rather takes them into consideration. Then, the artist will become an ironic philosopher.

Herminio J. Rodríguez  
August 20, 1998
At the request of my good friend, Timoteo Weisbenstein, I have temporarily come out of retirement in order to do a favor for him. Weisbenstein, the eccentric philosopher and philanthropist, who also has an affinity for the mysteries of the incognito, asked me to write a short review of the art work of Herminio J. Rodríguez in relation to Rodríguez's essay, Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell. This response will be subsequently published in the next issue of Weisbenstein's Review.

And so I journeyed to Rochester, New York, where the artist has been living for the past two years. Upon my arrival, I was directed to an old building where the art pieces in question were located. At first I thought that there must have been a gallery in that building. However, to my surprise, I was being led to the artist's studio. (I realized that for some reason the pieces weren't allowed to be exhibited in a gallery at this time. However I'm not going to get into that issue because it is not relevant to this text.) Mr. Rodríguez welcomed me to his studio, the space where the art pieces had been conceived, perceived, and, upon my visit, received. The mess and disarray of the room was typical of what you might expect from a working artist. He prefaced my investigation by telling me that his art was the making of one hand but many minds, and that the pieces were hidden within the space "like demons in the..."
earth or ghosts in a house". So I searched. Then I discovered them. In a moveable wall there were three holes at eye level (approximately 1/8 of an inch in diameter) that roused my curiosity. The scenes which I observed through the holes were outrageous. The first one consisted of a room filled with furniture where a cockroach was hanging and spinning from the ceiling and where other vermin were involved in various situations. The boundaries of the space were blurred by mirrors on the left and the right side and in the ceiling and the floor. At the end of the room there were a few red stripes indicating the continuation of another space.

The second scene I saw was a forest in which a donkey with the face of a man was looking towards me. At the end of the forest a circular window opened out to another space where a common donkey was walking. Each of the spaces was illuminated differently: the common donkey was illuminated with red light and the forest with yellowish light.

The third scene contained a red river, whose water rushed toward me and then dissapeared. At the end of the river there was a two headed goose, a goat with a goose hind end and a scene of a man confronting a hydra. These scenes before me were disturbing any sense of reality that I knew; (perhaps I had been standing in Heaven looking down into views of Hell?). The connection to Duchamp was obvious, and I expressed my feelings of this to the artist, who responded, "every art work is produced through the re-organization of previous 'languages'". I acknowledged his metaphor with reservation. Then He gave me his essay which I proceeded to read.

The essay is divided in six parts, the first being an introduction in which the writer/artist explains his goal. He proposes that, by definition, art cannot exist on its own. Art needs other languages and vocabularies - i.e. Literature and Philosophy- to portray a given idea, which is formed from those languages. Therefore, art production works intrinsically with theories of language. Indeed this concept is not
new and he acknowledged as much with the inclusion of an epigraph by the Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar: "I'm not aspiring for any copyright."

In the second part, entitled *The Sacred Language*, Rodríguez refers to particular theories of language and texts, such as those of Barthes and Borges to make the connection between literature and art. Rodríguez also uses the example of Duchamp's readymades to show how by using old vocabularies in a new context, language evolves within itself. He explains how a work of art should be interdisciplinary; and by doing so, it could resist modes of classification while at the same time demonstrating "a dialetical (Hegel) connection to its predecessors". Therefore in order to communicate an idea there must be a re-assessment and reorganization of previous vocabularies. At this point I began to understand the connection between the "holes" and Rodríguez's *Sacred Language*.

Here I will begin my hermeneutical exercise toward the actual pieces concerning this theory: the scene of cockroaches placed in a human situation refers to Kafka's idea of existentialism in *Metamorphosis*. Perhaps Kafka experienced the same feelings when he wrote about Gregor Samsa. This scene also refers to the underworld (where the vermin live) and where certain mythologies place Hell. Was I was looking at Hell? And from where? Seems to be that Hell is always there but we don't notice it. The donkey with the face of a man, perhaps a reference to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is transformed from one form to another. Perhaps the man is dreaming that he is a donkey with a human face dreaming about a normal donkey. Dreaming about a dream, like in Borges' story *Circular Ruins*. It certainly is Hell. And then there is a red river; the same river which Dante, who, with Virgil, smelled sulfur in the Inferno, complemented by the mythology of Hercules and the Hydra enclose the picture of Hell. Rodríguez's juxtaposition of these texts and vocabularies challenge traditional and conservative Bentleyanian theories of art, and propells language into a forward motion.
The third section entitled *The Quest for the Name of God* explains the function of the author in relation to text. In this part Rodríguez reviews Foucault's essay *What is an Author?* and explains how the piece reflects the historical context in which the author is positioned. Rodríguez also explains "his" use of pseudonyms as an enigma in which a new "text" is created within the text or the art piece. He cites from Borges and Bioy-Casares (Bustos Domeq) and Duchamp (R. Mutt) to support his ideas. Rodríguez is fully aware of his limitation as an author in the creative process. He sure know that he belongs to a time and a culture that depends of previous ones in order to communicate an idea to an audience - a specific one. The function of Rodríguez as an author is to locate himself, and the audience locate him too, in relation to the different texts that he used. This function permits us as an audience to group under Rodríguez's name a certain number of texts in which he established a relationship among the texts that he used- i.e. Kafka, Borges, Duchamp, Dante, Shakespeare- in order to create his work.

The fourth part is entitled *When the Urinal and the Shrine Danced.* Here Rodríguez explains how in art, there is a constant exchange of the values of signs and symbols through a semiotization of the objects in commodity. Rodríguez uses Karl Marx's theory of commodity and places it in the sphere of art production and appreciation. The semiotization of the object in commodity, according to Rodríguez, takes place when the object transends its original meaning to symbolize and take position in other context and other place that the object usually does not belong. In relation to Rodríguez's pieces, the cockroaches do not change their original representation as insects or vermin, nor in Kafka's. The cockroach is still a cockroach. However, by being placed within the context of art, the cockroaches assume an elevated position -commodity. They are now integrated into the vocabulary of art. In terms of their new status as a commodity, this peices will most likely be purchased to be included into the collection of an eccentric art connoisseur,
such as my friend Weisbenstein. These pieces will provide a status accommodation and a physical accommodation as well; comfort, not repugnance. In the same way that professor Douglas Crimp has placed Edward Weston's photos in his bedroom.

*God and the Ironist* is the fifth part, in which the author deals with the idea of the rationality involved in art's narratives and the role of the artist as an ironist as a conclusion of his theoretical equation. In the first part Rodríguez explains, through an analogy with theories of beliefs, how the constant change of narratives is how art survives in modern society. He proposes that traditional beliefs are characterized by symbolism that works through a process of rationality. This rationality, therefore, is intrinsically joined to conviction and permits the acceptance, without any doubt, of beliefs and, in this case, of art as a representation of nature. Art, previous to the twentieth century, according to the author, never was questioned by the artists and was organized in a traditional and rational order; i.e. paint belonged to walls and canvases and sculptures to pedestals and gardens. In this case, the tradition survives through time because of a consistency in a narrative or a language.

However, according to Rodríguez, modern or non-traditional beliefs, because of their literary characteristic (the use of rules or dogmas), permits its constant re-evaluation through language, the same way as it occurs in art. The re-evaluation of language, or the doubt about it, in modern culture occurs because of individualism and intellectualism, through the literacy of culture. This individualism and intellectualism provide a lack of consistency in follow one metanarrative, that was provided by rationalism. The constant re-evaluation of the theory threatens the survival of the traditional idea of art and permits the creation of different narratives at the same time. Following Rodríguez's last idea, there is no longer a rule of judgment or pleasure in art. There is not a God who recognizes his followers.

For Rodríguez, in the second part of this section, the action of doubting the rules created by tradition belongs to the ironist, following Richard Rorty's pragmatic
account. The ironist, as the author says, reunites characteristics of intellectualism and individualism in order to doubt previous vocabularies and languages in order to re-organize them for his own benefit—to doubt about stipulated rules. The ironist does not conceive nor believe in one metanarrative but innumerable narratives that work in the same sphere. To follow a commonsensical idea is to not doubt about previous rules. The ironist is not interested, as the author explains, in finding any truth but rather in mixing different vocabularies to create a new order in a new vocabulary without losing the meaning of previous vocabularies. He concludes that if this theory is used in order to make philosophy, an artist should be considered a ironic philosopher and an ironic philosopher an artist.

If I relate Rodríguez’s theory to his art, I can conclude that the artist is an ironic artist. His pieces, and the way that he mixed the different vocabularies for the realization of them, portray that idea. Rodríguez mixes literature, the marvelous world of insects, and methods of expression appropriated from previous and current artists. He doubts those vocabularies in order to create his art. He certainly created pieces that relate to previous vocabularies through a re-organization without expecting something new—not a copyright—through them.

The last part is a comment about the relation between the text and the art pieces, something about which I couldn’t care less.

Lecram P’mahcud
September 21, 1998
Slide List

1. *Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell.* (Cockroach, Furniture)

2. *Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell.* (Donkey, Forest)

3. *Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell.* (Donkey, Forest 2)

4. *Between the Peaceful Enlightenment of Heaven and the Revolutionary Dark Side of Hell.* (Red River)


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