

Marcel Duchamp's Endgames

THESES

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Theses

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1. I proposed a visual solution to Marcel Duchamp's 1943 *White to Play and Win* chess endgame problem based on the turning gesture in several of his works

The key to the puzzle comes from the Amor drawing on the back side. Duchamp specifies that it should be viewed from the other side *turned* towards the light. In this position Amor's arrow points on a pawn. One must start with this. However there is no numbering on the chessboard, so we only base our game direction that doesn't lead to any solution on the conventional numbering. Turned towards the light (and turned to Amor) the game can continue in the other direction. Played this way it is possible to complete Duchamp's dilemma, white to start and win. He doesn't stop here: with this solution only white can win!

I draw the conclusion from the above-mentioned Marcel Duchamp was trying to find and found a new perspective corresponding to the rules of the chess game. He used this to solve his endgame (chess, artistic and personal life) problems.

2. What did chess and notably the endgames mean to Duchamp?

An abstraction process is uncovered in Duchamp's confessions about chess. The formation of a three dimensional object into a thought. We are taking a similar path with the observation of the works and with the analysis of art. Based on this an interpretation can be drawn that through the aesthetics of the movement of the chesspieces the „hand and head” playing of chess leads to a spiritual plane, and is entirely happening in the grey matter.

If we interpret Marcel Duchamp's artworks as chess games and his chess games as artworks the endgame problems (because of their puzzle nature which he also used in other works) seem the most interesting. The endgame also hides the symbolic end of life when with fewer actors and in a constrained life space a person fights their lonely wars. Movements are reduced to the essence of life that are more potent and have a deeper meaning. Past, present and in time (in chess time also) heartwrenchingly and visibly finite future thickens into one heavy movement or step.

What could have been the final question, the problem that he so relentlessly and manically sought the answer for? The answer I think is not on the chessboard or in his art but in reality, we can find it in Duchamp's *lifegames*.

3. How did he play chess with his artworks?

The question that presented itself, can chess be used as a metaphor for Marcel Duchamp's art, was quickly verified. Accordingly, his artworks were chess moves in his imaginary chess game and his chess games were artworks. This course of thought is validated in the book of Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp the Art of Chess*. Francis M. Naumann places Duchamp's life stages and works in correlation to the chessgame's three phases (The Opening, Mid-Game, Endgame). If we accept this solution it is important to see the counter moves to given artworks. How did the contemporaries and the posterity react to particular moves by Duchamp?

Marcel Duchamp played chess with his artworks. All his important works were a next chess move after which he waited and observed the reactions. Duchamp probably familiarized himself with effective strategies very different from the lineal in chess and started to apply it in his art. These bold changes made it possible to observe the reactions of the environment, chess partners and the appreciative observers.

4. What role does the profane concept of *miracle* play for Duchamp?

The man of the middle ages was ignorant of chance and did not know the profane concept of miracle either. If God isn't performing the miracle then what is actually happening? In my theory we are experiencing the sudden appearance or have an intuition about a different perspective.

This is also a miracle, doubtless by its mechanism of action. Marcel Duchamp also researched this by his ready-mades or by turning the chessboard painted on his studio wall. He believed that playing chess this way he can find new solutions and set problems that can only be found by seers and thinkers of this dimension change.

This is the sudden appearance of the improbable, the inconprehensibly different in one unexpected move. It's an unknown opportunity, the prevision of another perspective. It is this different perspective that I think interested Duchamp the most. Probably the biggest miracle in chess is the pawn's transformation into queen (like a ready-made analogy) so it is no accident that Duchamp's interest focuses on the pawn endgame problems.

5. What kind of aesthetics can be outlined from this?

How is an artwork created?

How is an artwork viewed, and where?

Duchamp's answer to these is chess.

The way that the thoughts originating in the grey matter can be clearly and plainly visualized through a system -the system of the controlled chess game- in the physical world. This way thoughts become moves and the counter moves become newer thoughts. The artworks are created like this and they can be interpreted this way. Marcel Duchamp reached a new form of art through chess where the base is a clear logical form instead of symbols referring to one another.

6. The 1943 *White Plays and Wins* endgame problem's motivation and recipient was Maria Martins and their love.

Chess is the only game that since the middle ages could be played by lovers without the supervision of a chaperon.

„Duchamp found himself in a predicament that he was powerless to resolve, a situation that is subtly and ingeniously alluded to in a chess endgame problem he incorporated into the layout of an announcement he was asked to design for a show at the Julien Levy Gallery in December 1943.“

(Naumann, Francis M.: ***The Art of Chess***, Readymade Press, New York, 2009, 29. p.)

The above mentioned problem is discussed here. Duchamp started his last great art piece the enigmatic *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* after his break up with Maria. It seems after meeting Maria and with her a whirlwind of emotions he only played chess with her. Their game continued even after Duchamp's death as his biggest confession, his last big secret move only came to light then.

In my view Duchamp viewed, played and understood chess in a very different way. He found a perfect model in it, that he could apply to his art and to his personal life problems. A system that could align sentiment and thought and not only to play intellectual games but the most moving emotional games. A game of course is best if it has a stake and, we can't always win. Duchamp achieved both.