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Han and Dada: Early Expressions of New Affliction

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Abstract

This thesis studies affliction as it appears in the proto-avant-garde art movement of Dada. I analyse affliction through the theoretical frameworks of the 'neuronal' and 'immunological,' as presented by cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han in *The Burnout Society* (2015). By applying Han's theories to Dada, I challenge Han's argument that our affliction underwent a shift at the end of the Cold War: No longer produced by negativity (the immunological), affliction is now produced by excess positivity (the neuronal). Such excess blocks our access to and erodes the existence of 'somewhere else,' causing a crisis in the arts, which I argue should be attributed to neuronal affliction and traced back to Dada. Their response to World War I, both in content to some extent but particularly in method, during a period of globalization, alliances and rapidly changing technology and beliefs displays many features of neuronal affliction. Hence, the refusal, nihilism and negativity Dada has so often been characterized by in the past are misunderstandings of its inventive and playfully excessive methodologies. The aforementioned thesis is explored through the 'bacteriological' in Tristan Tzara's "Dada Manifesto 1918," the collage's hybrid nature and the power of tiredness in Max Ernst's *Murdering Airplane* (1920), and the positivity of Marcel Duchamp's 'possiblism,' as it appears in his readymade artwork, *Fountain* (1917).

Keywords

Dada, Byung-Chul Han, Neuronal, Immunological, Affliction, Tiredness, Exhaustion, Burnout, Crisis, Fantasy, Max Ernst, *Murdering Airplane*, Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, Perception, Possibility, Too Much.

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis studies affliction as it appears in the proto-avant-garde art movement, Dada. I analyse affliction through the theoretical frameworks of the 'neuronal' and 'immunological,' as presented by cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han in *The Burnout Society*. The 'immunological' is an age or paradigm defined by a vital tension between positive and negative, Self and Other. Han repeatedly claims that this mode, heavily inclined toward conflict, was a particularly strong defining feature of the twentieth century. In contrast, the 'neuronal' is an age unable to manage negativity as it progressively becomes more 'positive,' prioritizing speed, freedom, transparency, smoothness, amounting to more information and faster exchanges of capital. Han argues that we have become so fixated on these issues that we are unable to see they are the sources of our contemporary afflictions. We no longer have a problem of *too little*, but of *too much*. Our pain is not imposed on us from the Other, but by ourselves as we perpetually try to achieve more and rest less. Consequently, neuronal affliction is defined by hyperactivity, burnout and depression, all produced by excess positivity.

By applying Han's theories to Dada, I challenge Han's argument that our affliction underwent a shift at the end of the Cold War. This problematizes Han's hard, dualist split between the two modes of affliction. It also positions neuronal affliction as not strictly the product of digital technology and neoliberal capitalism, but more broadly a quality of being 'modern,' suggesting that Dada may have important lessons for our contemporary world. I argue that the Dadaists were responding to this new neuronal affliction as early as World War I, a period of globalization, alliances and rapidly changing technology and beliefs. Hence, the refusal, nihilism and negativity Dada has so

often been characterized by in the past are misunderstandings of its inventive and playfully excessive methodologies. The aforementioned thesis is explored through the 'bacteriological' in Tristan Tzara's "Dada Manifesto 1918," the collage's hybrid nature and the power of tiredness in Max Ernst's *Murdering Airplane* (1920), and the positivity of Marcel Duchamp's 'possiblism' as it appears in his readymade artwork, *Fountain*.

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Introduction

In *New Studies in Dada* Richard Sheppard's opening sentence acknowledges that "until quite recently, a fair understanding of Dada was made difficult by the pervasiveness of the view that it was a purely negative phenomenon" (Sheppard 3). In the view of many art historians and cultural theorists Dada was nihilistic buffoonery that flew in the face of the tragedy of World War I or childish tantrums unworthy of notice. Nearly forty years later, Dada has become the crux of modernism, but it is still viewed as negative: as an anti-art, nihilism or refusal. Dada's profoundly different set of assumptions, which value irrationality, chance and so-called 'anti' human or machinic perspectives over rational human projects are rarely discussed outside of opposition, conflict and negation. Sheppard nearly escaped this way of thinking when he said, "all forms of Dada proclaimed a dialectical attitude which says 'Yes' and 'No' simultaneously, and the mix between the positive and negative ingredients varied from person to person and place to place" (Sheppard 8). Yet, the simultaneity of Dada's 'Yes' and 'No' is not dialectically opposed. Instead, it is an additive 'and… and… and,' playfully mutating what was once distinct into something beyond rational understanding. As a result, it is best to consider Dada's simultaneity as an 'and' that accumulates and hybridizes while escaping a linear calculation that simply 'adds up.' The rapidly globalizing industrial era of Dada, like today, was accruing more and more sensations, identities, representations, technologies, alliances and opinions that, I argue, became *too much*, producing a simulation of 'negativity' that functions in an entirely different way than a 'dialectical attitude.' This is

a key feature of what cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han describes as a new paradigm defined by an affliction of excess positivity.

In the opening chapter of *The Burnout Society* (2015) Han identifies two ages defined by affliction. Our current one, the neuronal age, is pained by its excesses and inability to manage negativity while the previous age, the immunological, is cast as an opposition between positive and negative features. It is best to describe these two ages beginning with the immunological. As a combative paradigm, it is defined by division. On one side there is the Self, on the Other there is the Other. The immunological orients itself around the opposition to the Other, similar to the way the body resists bacterial and viral infections. The immunological is a battleground for survival, always defending against the Other's advances while seeking immunity. It contains an inherent understanding of inside and outside, safe and dangerous, positive and negative. The neuronal, on the other hand, is a purely positive paradigm that cannot manage negativity or the Other. It does not recognize the Other's advances, nor does it organize itself in relation to negativity. The neuronal has effectively outsmarted the immunological. It has succeeded at immunity—at least theoretically. Because the neuronal age is no longer primarily afflicted by external forces, the source of its pain is now internalized. External sources of suffering are identifiable, manageable and preventable. The neuronal, by contrast, places pressure on our organization, attention and will, that is, it emphasizes the mind rather than the body. Our contemporary afflictions are no longer caused by trespasses of the Other, as with infection; rather, they are composed of excess positivity and an absence of negativity. Whereas before we might bleed out from wounds, we now fear heart attacks created by blood clots, an affliction we are repeatedly told is caused by

poor *choices*. Threats such as clots are not defended against in the moment so much as managed over time. In this way, we suffer from "psychic disturbances such as exhaustion, fatigue, and depression—all of which are to be traced back to the excess of positivity" (*The Transparency Society* 6). This is to say that we suffer from too much of ourselves. We are afflicted by systemic, long term, repetitive mistakes in our care for our own bodies and heath rather than sudden ruptures of the Other. We trip over ourselves as we scramble to reach where we already are, burning out from hyperactivity rather than immunizing against the threat of the Other.

This thesis argues that what Han calls the "crisis of fantasy in literature and the arts" originates from this shift between the immunological and the neuronal and, importantly, this begins with Dada (*The Agony of Eros* 41). The Dadaists, appalled by the First World War, considered rational thought to be at the centre of their new suffering. As Tristan Tzara says in his "Dada Manifesto 1918," "logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease." That is, logic at work within the human would only serve to lead us to our downfall. "Science says we are the servants of nature: everything is in order, make love and bash your brains in" (Tzara 39). In Tzara's view, science as a manifestation of logical thought describes strict systems that lead us to dialectical relations with which we bond and ultimately destroy. It was not the actual wounds of 'bashing our brains in' during the Great War that had significant impact on individuals, but the systemic problems produced by reason and the subsequent depression of being 'imprisoned' inside those systems. Austria-Hungry's war with Serbia, caused by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, spread beyond the two nations, expanding along a web of allegiances creating two coalitions: the Triple Entente (France, Russia and Britain) and

the Triple Alliance (Austria-Hungry and Italy). In this way, the suffering of World War I is found primarily in an additive chain-reaction of 'ands' that drew the world into war, not in the conflict itself.

Depression and exhaustion abounded in the trenches where soldiers were at work going nowhere, far from home, seemingly a world away. As one of Marcel Duchamp's brothers, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, noted in a letter he wrote while serving in a medical unit near Paris, "We are as far away from Paris, where some friends are working now, as from New York" (Hamilton and Agee 119). Similarly, the reality of being injured in the field was exhausting and a cause for depression. "It could take four hours to carry an injured man half a mile and, being upright and close together, helpers were easy targets even for erratic gunfire. The result was that thousands of men fought and died in quagmires of mud, sewage and decaying corpses beneath the menaces of bombing and gassing. Compounding their misery, sleep was almost impossible" (Wright 82). The tense psychology of soldiers, medics as well as the general civilian population was compounded by their exhaustion. George Grosz captured the exhaustion and machinic disfunction of the soldier as well as society at large in his poem *Kaffeehaus* (1918) when he says, "I am a machine whose pressure gauge has gone to pieces! And all the cylinders run in a circle."[1] As Brigid Doherty beautifully explains in her inspiring text "See: We are all Neurasthenics!," "the circular pattern of the parts in motion indicates a machine out of control, an engine running hot but exhausted, as though driven through the paces of madness rather than those of production. The pathology of the machine thus described is internal. To repeat, a pressure gauge has blown, and the parts spinning inside do not

[1] Translated by Brigid Doherty (95).

know how or when to stop" (97). The exhaustion expressed both literally, visually and methodologically in the Dadaists is what I particularly want to focus on as it contrasts the jovial energy, noise, and "refusal" Dada is often characterized with, in other words, its negativity.[2] Although World War I was not necessarily the beginning of the neuronal age for Han, it certainly appears to be the *outbreak*. This is an important distinction to make as the Dadaists were not expressing a purely neuronal form, but a simultaneous merger of the immunological and the neuronal, as seen in their characteristic 'Yes' and 'No,' which simultaneously holds multiple possibilities.

The contagious psychology of Dada repositions or stretches the decline of the immunological and rise of the neuronal back some 70 years from Han's original proposition. "Indeed, the immunological paradigm of the last century was commanded by the vocabulary of the Cold War, an altogether military dispositive" (*The Burnout Society* 1). However, the militaristic events of the twentieth century do not preclude the development of different expressions. Han has overlooked the slow emergence of the neuronal throughout the twentieth century, beginning with Dada as an expression of affliction that escaped traditional, immunological explanation. The new methodologies of Dada, such as collage, chance and simultaneity, are explorations of the new, neuronal, excess positivity. I argue, this is a reason why Dada was still so misunderstood even in the late 70s and early 80s when Sheppard was compiling his book. Although Dada describes a modernizing world and psychology, many of the key figures, such as Marcel

[2] In an interview with James Johnson Sweeny for NBC in 1956, Duchamp commented, "Dada was no longer concerned with the plastic arts properly speaking, it wasn't interested in questions of technique or with the movements before it. It was more interested in literature. In fact, it was negative, a total refusal" (*Essential Writings* 135).

Duchamp and Max Ernst, appear to have found ways to escape neuronal affliction affecting us today, as Han describes it. Extending the presence of the neuronal to the beginning of the twentieth century problematizes Han's frequent claim that it was particularly saturated by the immunological. Adjusting the inception of the neuronal age back to the First World War not only weakens neuronal affliction's dependency on digital technology and neoliberal capitalism but it also positions Dada as a kind of premonition of them, or at least some of their consequences. Here a question arises of whether the 'military dispositive' Han applies to the last century was caused by a mounting aggression toward the Other or a destabilizing amount of choice and responsibility for ourselves and for nature amidst rapid industrialization and change. Reading Han and Dada together provides a better understanding of how affliction in both immunological and neuronal modalities function together rather than what Han presents as a dualist split between the two.

This thesis opens new scholarly possibilities by bringing Han's work on affliction in relation with Dada as a site for the initial 'crisis in the arts.' I have developed three essays, each looking at different Dadaists who played significant roles in the movement while investigating how exhaustion and fantasy appear in their work. The first essay takes Tristan Tzara's "Dada Manifesto 1918" as its focus, exploring the Dadaist tendency to use 'bacteriological' language to explain the new form of neuronal affliction. Here, I further develop Han's reason for distinguishing between 'immunological' and 'neuronal' modes by theorizing the consequences of including dangerous qualities within the Self: it is exhausting. Exhaustion is a key feature of Han's 'Burnout Society.' It leaves no room for relaxation, contemplation or fantasy. The second essay offers Han's conception of a

'tired vision' to develop an unwritten 'neuronal optics' to accompany his 'immunological optics,' which cloud our capability to see beyond a relationship of "attack and defense" (*The Burnout Society* 1). Max Ernst's collage *Murdering Airplane* (1920) helps to explain these optics as it displays immunological traits as well as neuronal ones. Upon the application of my conception of a 'neuronal optics,' *Murdering Airplane* acts as a perceptual pivot for two fundamentally different afflictions caused by our subjective perception. The third and final essay turns to Marcel Duchamp's notion of 'possibility' as a key component in Han's neuronal affliction, produced by an all-encompassing Self that fundamentally is unable to completely accept the negativity of impossibility. This is developed further with the initial reception of the readymade artwork *Fountain* (1917), which describes a meeting of immunological limits and the new form of neuronal expression. The 'no jury' system the Society of Independent Artists attempted to employ in 1917 assumed that the artwork submitted to their exhibition would fall under their pre-existing 'immunological' expectations of art. Duchamp's submission of a urinal as artwork not only disrupted this assumption, but posed exhausting philosophical problems artists and theorists are still navigating today. Together, these three essays explore the problem of exhausted fantasies and the Dadaists unique way of playing around it.

Today, our inability to imagine alternatives has become a serious problem. Bringing Han's theory of affliction into contact with Dada follows the trajectory of the last few decades while considering Dada as a significant critical intervention in art history. I claim that Dada, its relationship to Otherness and its unique way of seeing the world is not only an important critical reaction to early twentieth century problems but also to early twenty-first century problems as well. The relationship between Han and

Dada is an as of yet unexplored area of research, at least in the English-speaking world. Similarly, a mixture of the immunological and neuronal modalities does not exist in Han's writing and merits exploration. Exploring these connections and others like it is an important contribution to Hanian and Dada scholarship as Han's proposed paradigm shift pivots on modernism, a flexible, if not wholly ambiguous, term. One way that Han's 'paradigms' have impacted my understanding of modernism is that the immunological and neuronal are more than modes of affliction. They acknowledge pain and its avoidance (or attraction) as the motor that drives behaviour, decision making and our ability to imagine alternatives in (post)modern society.

I could not have arrived at this understanding without drawing connections between the neuronal and Dada, which expressed a new relation to dogmatically accepted modernist values, like reason, that have heavily influenced art and culture ever since. This has curiously positioned Dada at both the beginning and (supposed) end of modernism. Their unique positioning in the margins of both immunological and neuronal ages also suggests that the misattributions of negativity to Dada may contain suggestions for how to cope or adjust to a new age with new problems. In this light, nihilism and buffoonery appear quite similar to the optimism or naïveté of children's play. Can we really continue to think of Dada as negative in this way? When Han claims there is a 'crisis in the arts' it then becomes a symptom of a different crisis, one of identifying our affliction. Without an understanding of our affliction we experience exhausting difficulty in imagining even the most basic fantasies and alternatives to our current problems. In sum, this thesis argues that the problem of the neuronal age was already being critiqued by Dadaists at the beginning of the twentieth century and our lack of relationship to

negativity and the Other make imagining somewhere else impossible because of an oppositional, calculating, rational perception. This new contribution to Dada scholarship suggests its trademark negativity is a misunderstanding of a new 'logic,' for lack of better term (still), composed of excess positivity, which is not only just as harmful, but all the more so on account of its invisibility to the immunological optics we employ. As Han has begun to explain, our afflictions are no longer produced (primarily) by the Other. As Dada has attempted to express, our new afflictions are easily understood as just nihilism and nonsense. As I will argue in the following pages, considering the manner in which we perceive dangers and possibilities is the first step toward, as Han would say, *somewhere else*.

Exhausting Fantasies of Somewhere Else: A Mixture of the Safe and Dangerous

In *The Agony of Eros* (2017) Byung-Chul Han claims that we are facing a "crisis of fantasy" driven by the dissipation of hard thresholds between the Self and Other (41). Han's specific reasoning for this claim will be explored in the next chapter. Here, our concern lies with expressions of this crisis in the form of what Han refers to as the 'neuronal.' The neuronal is a positive paradigm that *lacks recognition of negativity* and the Other. Our contemporary afflictions are no longer caused by trespasses of the Other. Rather, they are composed of excess positivity and an absence of negativity. This manifests as "psychic infarctions" such as hyperactivity, burnout and depression (*The Burnout Society* 6). We can imagine excess as a blood clot in which affliction does not stem from external incursions like a wound or infection created against our will, but as the build-up of our own accumulation. Crucially, the 'clotting' of neuronal affliction, or psychic infarctions, is produced by recurrent, systemic behaviour, particularly of our conscious choices. Sudden ruptures or infections, on the other hand, is what Han refers to as 'immunological affliction,' in which our suffering is caused by the Other—or other than the Self and against the Self's wishes. The consequence of shifting affliction to a neuronal modality is that the Self, the body and the mind, become simultaneously dangerous and safe, laced with Otherness. Fantasy, then, becomes a failed escape from our ailments, not only because these ailments are in us but particularly because fantasy comes from our mind now 'sick' with immanent dangers that clot an imagining of *somewhere else*.

Contrary to Han's theorizing that this turn occurred *late* in the twentieth century, early twentieth century artists from the Dada 'movement' used the vocabulary of

immunology, though its methodologies were neuronal. This results in a comingling of two always-present modes. On the one hand, there is the immunological mode based in conflict between the Self and Other, inside and outside, safe and dangerous and, on the other hand, the neuronal mode afflicts itself with *too much*. What follows is a consideration of: how Han developed his terms for affliction in relation to immunology; a direct application of that reasoning to the artwork *Murdering Airplane* (1920) by Max Ernst; how the 'crisis of fantasy' is a concern Marcel Duchamp addressed with his first readymade *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1917); how the 'negativity' Dada is perpetually inscribed with is a misunderstanding of Dada's use of Kantian indifference; and how the judgements Dada makes of its contemporaneous world are not of the Other, but of themselves, the failings of the human race and its politics leading to debilitating, unshakable exhaustion.

Including Nasty Aggregates

Infectious language is used frequently in Dada writings and artwork. We find this in Max Ernst's "The Old Vivisectionist," Raoul Hausmann's "Put Your Money in dada!" and Tristan Tzara's "Dada is a Virgin Germ," just to name a few instances of writing.[3] Tzara also makes reference to the 'bacteriological' affects of Dada in his "Dada Manifesto 1918," appearing quite fond of the recurring imagery of rats and their pestilence. "Plague," "spores," "cells" and other such terms illustrate the atmosphere of that time from the critical perspective of Dada, as George Grosz and Wieland Hertzfelde said,

[3] Notably, Ernst also made a collage with overpainting that emphasizes his interest in infection and cells, *The Gramineous Bicycle Garnished with Bells the Dappled Fire Damps and the Echinoderms Bending the Spine to Look for Caresses* (1920).

something was “floating in the air” (Grosz and Hertzfelde 468). Expressions of this sort were used frequently to acknowledge the nearly simultaneous emergence of this like-minded international movement of Dadas and the collaborations between them. The individual cells of Dada, notably in Zurich, Berlin and Paris, were plagued by the chaos of war. Struck dumb by the destruction of opposition, the antibodies of society’s immune system had failed, miserably; leaving such a gaping, infected wound that cacophony and catharsis seemed as reasonable a remedy as medicine itself. Suturing together rotten components of society was an idea reminiscent of Frankenstein’s monster, a reference the Dadaists would likely have enjoyed due to their interest in machine-human hybrids and collage, topics to be explored in the following pages. The activities of Dada dissolved the distinctions between art and life, intention and chance, Own and Other in a mimicry of the First World War. This is a significant moment in which a new paradigm begins to emerge. The technologies of defence and immunity falter under the global political alliances that caused the war. This was a new logic of inclusion rather than opposition, opening an opportunity not to fight the rot so much as assimilate it—or even become it. Curiously, this is not when Han identifies the emergence of the neuronal. For him, the neuronal is a contemporary form of affliction.

“Every age has its signature afflictions,” Han tells us (*The Burnout Society* 1). According to Roberto Esposito what afflicts us is still immunological. In his words, “what remains constant is the place where the threat is located, always on the border between the inside and the outside, between the self and other, the individual and the common” (Esposito 2). This is what he calls the “immunitary paradigm,” linking the disparate phenomena that cause our suffering and structure our behaviour. It seems

exceptionally likely this is where Han took his own paradigmatic shift from as both theorists defining their respective 'immunological' and 'immunitary' paradigms do so in very similar ways. "What frightens us today is not contamination per se—which has been viewed as inevitable for some time now—as much as its uncontrolled and unstoppable diffusion throughout all the productive nerve centers of our lives" (Esposito 2-3). Because of this shift away from 'contamination' toward 'nerve centers' and because "it is practically coextensive with the space," Han diverges from Esposito (Esposito 3). "Esposito's immunological analysis does not address contemporary problems, but only ones from the past" (*The Burnout Society* 3). In the past, these afflictions have been bacterial and viral, which the immune system opposes. Now, Han argues, we suffer from neurological disorders such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, borderline personality disorder, and burnout. The immune system is not only unable to deal with these disorders; it can aggravate them by mistaking the chronic grind of modern life with the short, but vital, response to a predator or infection. What we suffer from today is "not infections, but infarctions" (*The Burnout Society* 1). Importantly, Han makes this distinction through immunologist Polly Matzinger's work on 'useful' and 'dangerous' cells.[4] For Han, this paper's publication pairs the end of the immunological age with the end of the Cold War; within the thirteen-year period of Matzinger's research from 1994 to its publication in 2007.

[4] See the first endnote in *The Burnout Society*: "a paradigm shift occurred within medical immunology at the end of the Cold War. In America, Polly Matzinger discarded the immunological model of preceding decades. According to her model, the immune system does not distinguish between 'self' and 'non-self,' i.e. domestic and foreign, but between 'friendly' and 'dangerous'" (53).

Matzinger argues the existing model for immune response is overly simplistic, in which there is a mistaking of chemical changes within tissue as a response to external stimulus. This overlooks the possibility of changes occurring for interior purposes. Matzinger adapted her theories on immunology not only to include varied processes of immunity but repair as well. This is a significant theoretical shift as it recognizes stimulation can originate from and be responded to within what is one's Own, not necessarily extending to a relation with the Other. Thus "the ultimate control lies with the tissues in which the response occurs, rather than with the pathogen against which it is directed" (Matzinger 12). Here, behaviour is no longer strictly governed by opposition. It is "not tolerance or suppression. It is simply a switch of effector class" (Matzinger 13). From this perspective Han's conception of the neuronal begins to emerge. Changes that can and have been measured in terms of conflict are potentially simplistic misunderstandings of the complexity found in all possible actions available to tissue cells.

Complex relationships to stimulus not only present questions of how a cell is interacting, but what 'effector class' is operating. Each one of these classes are part of a larger body operating with far more complexity than binary opposition to pathogens or the Other, as Matzinger points out in relation to water:

> Because life evolved in water, the hydrophobic portions ('Hyppos') of molecules are both useful and dangerous: useful because hydrophobic interactions hold membranes together, mold the shape of complex proteins and so on; dangerous because exposed Hyppos aggregate non-specifically to form nasty aggregates. (Matzinger 11)

In this example, water is both ‘useful’ and ‘dangerous’ to cells, implying that within an immunological framework what is dangerous is also useless. Immunological danger is an element of the Other that cannot be controlled, used, or understood. Absorbing the distinction of ‘dangerous’ into ‘useful’ occurs for Matzinger through a recognition of the cell as composed of multiple parts with different functions. Each part, therefore, makes use of, and are threatened by, different elements. This transition to a *neuronal* form of relating recognizes a previously unacknowledged complexity and ambiguity between the Self and the Other making ‘danger’ a relative and fluctuating term. Fluctuating identifications of ‘useful’ and ‘dangerous’ is, then, a subtler conversation about threats, which are not necessarily malign or foreign, dissolving the central logic of the immunological by accepting aspects of danger rather than immunizing against it. Danger is no longer imposed upon the Self by the Other, an affliction it must immunize *against*, rather it is an omnipresent quality of life we must live *with*.

In Max Ernst’s *Murdering Airplane* (1920) we see multiple images living with one another in a single collage. The collage depicts a black and white World War I era biplane that appears to be hatching the yellowed arms of a catalogue model or perhaps a Grecian nude statue in mid-flight. Its front portion is without a propeller, worming its way through the sky. A strangely weightless dance, as though it were dreaming. In the bottom right corner two soldiers carry an amputee, without his lower legs, out of frame. And in the background is a desolate expanse of grey. Once separate images now share their representations in a collaborative effort to produce a new image. Each portion of the collage is delineated by the cut edge of the picture-fragment, clearly marking out different sources Ernst gathered from. However, this new composite image is viewed as a

single piece by way of the picture-fragments living with one another on the same picture plane. The boundaries between the fragmented parts of the collage are, in effect, permeable. They share aspects of themselves. They are different while lacking Otherness. For Han, "such difference lacks the sting of foreignness, as it were, which would provoke a strong immunoreaction" (*The Burnout Society* 2). The immune response, here, is to remove the dangerous Other from the Self but this does not appear in collage. The constituent parts of collage do not seek to remove Otherness; the image thrives on the disjunction. The different pieces of a collage are its language, a contagious one at that, as fragments of different pictures unite to create a new hybrid. This is an additive process, the same as Dr. Frankenstein used on body parts. Of course, elements of the original images are lost, cut away, but the conversation of collage incorporates this negativity. The danger of loss is glossed over through the positive act of creating something new. 'Positivizing' the loss of its previous parts, the collage becomes a hybrid just as *Murdering Airplane* is a hybrid—part human and part machine.

Hybridity, in this way, is reminiscent of the relation Jacques Derrida attributes to Emmanuel Levinas. According to Derrida, Levinas' philosophy is defined by hospitality; "Although the word is neither frequently used nor emphasized within it, *Totality and Infinity* bequeaths to us an immense treatise *of hospitality*" (Derrida 21). Levinas' theorization of the subject and Self positions it so that its openness or hospitality toward the Other is its constituting feature. The Self not only welcomes the Other but is itself the welcome. Thus 'hospitality' situates the subject and Self as a host or guest of and for the Other and is defined by this relationship. Because of the Self's receiving nature, Levinas argues that its openness receives a kind of teaching. "The relation with the Other, or

Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching" (Levinas 51). In order to receive teaching from the Other any form of immune reaction to the Other must be put aside in a 'non-allergic relation.' Derrida, years after writing on Levinas' hospitality, goes on to describe the shifting immune response that, in part, appears to support Han's claim that the Other has effectively become fully-hosted by the Self. In *Rogues*, he observes that during the Cold War the Other-as-enemy dissipated into nameless individuals inside the State, rather than as a clearly defined exterior enemy. In order to immunize the Self against threats increasingly appearing inside the Self—hosted within the Self—parts of the Self must be killed or immunized. Derrida goes in the opposite direction as Han, arguing that this makes all others 'wholly other.' Han, on the other hand, believes that the Other has dissolved into the Self. Oddly, both of these seemingly separate interpretations reflect Matzinger's observation that the Self contains both friendly and dangerous parts, which are both considered the Self or part of the same cell.

The threat of atomized 'Others' inside the Self functions on another level, as Derrida notes, the Self's role as 'host' flips to 'hostage.' This leads to the interpretation that the speckling of Others within the Self positions the Self as a hostage to these interior dangers, aware of them but struggling to identify a 'front' for attack and defense. The subject becomes a hostage of the Other because of its necessary openness to the Other. It must be always vulnerable to whims outside its own, hence Levinas' 'non-allergic relation.' It is in this sense of hostage that we find Han's understanding of the Self/Other dynamic, or lack thereof. His concern with the positivized 'differences' that we can see in collage is that we have become unwitting hostages. Where Han has built upon or deviated

from Levinas is that in the neuronal age we are no longer able to actually understand Otherness in any meaningful way. Our impulse toward conflict still exists, as the previous sentence's use of 'opposition' nods to, but our ability to commune or manage the Other has evaporated. In this sense, we are hosting the Other while holding ourselves hostage without consciously knowing this. In terms of collage, the composite image brings Levinas' hospitality into full focus. Each image-fragment hosts another in order to come together as something new. Its hybrid form is each image's hospitality toward another.

Hybridity was important for Dada both as a methodology and as topic.[5] They sought to unify art and life. We can see it in their collage, Ernst's frottage and grottage, Tzara's simultaneous poems and Duchamp's readymades. All of these methodologies work to combine one with another: frottage and grottage steal the texture of real objects through a process of rubbing, which are then combined with other rubbings and interventions made by the artist to create a new unified image; simultaneous poetry merges and obliterates singular voices, their communications melting into a chance-based production of sound and nonsense considered as one singular piece; and the readymade is a hybrid of useful and useless, its status as art-object never completely removing its status as a urinal, bottle rack, or shovel—never mind the obvious hybridity of assisted readymades such as Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), part stool and part wheel.

[5] On hybridity as it relates to the Dadaist conception of Self, body, politics and artistic practice, specifically in Europe, see Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* and Elza Adamowicz, *Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground*.

As for the Dadaist's topical interest in the hybrid "one of the central themes of Dada in Berlin and New York was man-as-machine. Feeling that mankind had definitively thrown in its lot with mechanization, Dadaist artists in both cities developed a highly sophisticated iconography of 'mechanomorphs', human-machine hybrids," as we can see in *Murdering Airplane* (Hopkins 103)—a curious choice for a movement so intent upon bacteriological language, though, perhaps not, for a machine cannot catch a cold. It is impervious, or at least indifferent to the threats of the immunological. A machine has no immune system.[6] It does not care about bacteria or microbes. Dadaists were mechanomorphs, in their own words, "ghosts drunk on energy […] resin and rain are our sweat, we bleed and burn with thirst, our blood is vigour" (Tzara 37). Their relentless energy and nonsense are characteristic of a machine malfunctioning, computing incompatible information. They perpetually want more, unable to turn themselves off without the aid of the Other. Unable to rest or slack their thirst, they are a hybrid, both human and machine 'unable to not be not be able', as Han would say, looking for the Other to gratify and turn them off. Such a thing is undeniably a component of the neuronal, not the immunological. The hybrid has a diffuse sense of Self and no immune system, as Han acknowledges, "hybridization […] stands diametrically opposed to immunization" (*The Burnout Society* 3). The hybrid depends upon a difference that lacks

[6] Today this is no longer true, for we find a form of immune system in computers. Anti-virus software and firewalls are just two examples of the ways our computers defend against infection. Increasingly, digital media is discussed in terms of the bacteriological. For example, Douglas Rushkoff's 'media virus' is a characterization of the way media mimics infection. However, the physical hardware of the machine is still without an immune system. It is this pre-digital form of machine the Dadaists worked with.

Otherness in order to assimilate it. This is produced by an excess positivity that constitutes the hybrid status of not just being one, but mixed.

The hybrid leads us to a possible understanding of Dada's interest in the bacteriological. We never say we are infected with so many Alphacoronavirus parasites. We say we have *a* cold. Bacteria's pluralistic status as both one and many suited Dada while being a quality of the neuronal. The ability to simultaneously portray microbes as closed cells as well as mindless, interconnected swarms while inciting the viral lunacy of the war and its associated illnesses is itself a hybridization. The bacteriological language characterizes the contagious conflict of the First World War, but symbolizes conflict with an unseen, exhausting force. This is a neuronal affliction. In this way, bacteria are a halfway point between the outright combat of war and the self-imposed depression and exhaustion of the neuronal age. *Murdering Airplane* captures this transition quite well as it is clearly a depiction of war, though it is rendered psychologically. Anthropo-morphizing the machine with the addition of human arms is a neuronal hybrid. The affective quality of this plane-monster suspended like a spectre over the three soldiers is in an environment completely devoid of any naturalism. Exhaustion, depression and their unseen source permeates the image. The neuronal features of *Murdering Airplane* abound, which brings about the question: when did the shift from the immunological to the neuronal begin? Dada.

However, Han has a different answer: he says the neuronal began at the end of the Cold War. Matzinger's adjustment to the language of immunology hails the definitive end to the immunological age. Han presents this as a sudden shift, leaving it surprisingly and provocatively undeveloped. But, from studying Dada, we can see the emergence of

neuronal behaviour and affliction far earlier than the end of the Cold War. Dada too conflates the useful and dangerous. It speaks of infections *with* infarctions, clotting around points of meaning, dismantling language and image in order to rebuild them sometimes as useful 'proteins' and sometimes nasty aggregates. Dada no longer follows the immunological logic of elimination. It *includes* nasty aggregates.

The Crisis of Fantasy

Inclusivity is the methodology of the neuronal. It "expresses itself as the *exhaustion* and *inclusion* that characterize the society of achievement," today's society (*The Burnout Society* 48). The neuronal operates through distinctions of difference rather than Otherness.[7] Like Matzinger's cells, categories describe a Self composed of different pieces that work together to make a whole. These different pieces, though distinct, are not separated by the thresholds that bar the Self from the Other. The end of the immunological means we have no immune response to the Other because the Other is no longer recognized. The dangerous and unusable quality of the Other has been incorporated into the Self through alliances and shrinking degrees of separation. What has replaced the opaque interstice between Self and Other is the transparency of categories.

Categories lack the opacity of Otherness, instead prioritizing transparency for the sake of legibility, as we saw with the hybridization of collage. The edges of individual pieces of the collage are permeable, allowing the image to be read as a whole. In this

[7] 'Difference' is a term favoured by Han that emphasizes capitalism's interest in minute and inconsequential changes between items. For example, the difference in colour between two toothbrushes are completely inconsequential to their purpose, rendering them effectively the *same*. Han is particularly concerned with this barely concealed sameness of 'difference' that he feels is replacing true *otherness.*

way, transparency's utilitarianism drains us of our imagination, resulting in a crisis of fantasy, which Han claims is "the contemporary crisis in literature and the arts" (*The Agony of Eros* 41). In order to optimize the smooth functionality of an increasingly complex world transparency becomes an indispensable technique and quality, which sacrifices literature and the arts to pornographic transparency.

The more transparent and visible systems of organization are the more legible, and pornographic, their contents. The organization of categories removes surprises and the unknown, accelerating the flow of information. This improves the usefulness of a category's contents. Such pornographic access to the information contained within categories is 'hypervisible.' As Han says, this "is not conducive to imagination. As such, pornography—which maximizes visual information, as it were—destroys erotic fantasy" (*The Agony of Eros* 38). The more transparent the category the less imaginative its contents and the less erotic the experience. For Han, the negativity of the erotic, which veils portions of information, is also the constituting agent of the beautiful. In his words, "it is the dress that is divine" (*Saving Beauty* 55). To remove the dress is to remove the elusive quality of the beautiful.[8] "Unveiling disenchants and destroys beauty. Thus, it lies in the nature of beauty that it cannot be unveiled. / Pornography—as nakedness without any drapes, without any secrets—is the opposite figure to beauty. Its ideal place is the shop window" (*Saving Beauty* 53). The exposing 'shop window' of categories ruins the beauty it may have contained, opting, instead, for the usefulness of transparency.

[8] This is obviously a problematic construction. The implications attached to Han's use of the 'dress' ring with objectification of the female body. I have chosen to continue working with the concept of the dress in an attempt to draw attention to the issues entangled in Han's use of the term on page 46 of this thesis.

Through the shop window customers see objects they want and need, grouped together in different displays for different stores depending on what exactly they are looking for. For Han, these 'wants' and 'needs' differ from desire, which "is always desire for the *Other.* The negativity of privation and absence nourishes it. As the object of desire, the *Other* escapes the positivity of choice," which so characterizes consumer capitalism's wants and needs (*The Agony of Eros* 37). In this way, desire demands limited access, which it seeks to extend beyond. Though, the same could be said of wants and needs, these terms also wish to extend beyond the limits that define them. The division between having and not having is present in all three of these concepts. Drawing on the previous distinction of 'useful' and 'dangerous', then, desire is unique because of its drive to make the dangerous useful, or more accurately make the useless useful. Desire's nourishment from the Other—from privation and absence—is a longing for what cannot be used, which paradoxically makes the Other's uselessness useful as the end and means congeal into one.

Marcel Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915) grabs hold of this strange paradox. His choice of everyday, mass-produced objects question whether the useful and useless can co-exist. Dada in general did the same as it sought to merge art and life. But Duchamp goes further by involving the 'positivity of choice.'[9] Choosing a ready-made object to be art unveiled the process of production withheld from the spectator, where the enchantment of how it was made resides. Instead, the readymade veiled something else

[9] In the *Agony of Eros*, Han tells us, "unchecked freedom of choice is threatening to bring about the *end of desire.* Desire is always desire for the *Other.* The negativity of privation and absence nourishes it. As the object of desire, the *Other* escapes the positivity of choice" (37).

far more exhausting to consider—for many it was, and still is, outright depressing—the question of what *is* art, anyway?[10] Up until that moment art was defined by the way it was made, with skill, effort and time. This conflation of art and life is seen dramatically with *In Advance of a Broken Arm.* Originally made in 1915, before the infamous urinal, this store-bought shovel disappeared from history only to reappear, reincarnated, for an exhibition held at Yale by Professor George Heard Hamilton and artist Katherine S. Dreier. As Hamilton recounts,

> Nobody came to see it -- the papers were too taken up with the fall of Berlin -- and it just dangled from the ceiling in an empty hall. Miss Dreier had insisted that, since it really wasn't a painting or a piece of sculpture, it couldn't be hung on a wall or placed on pedestal. And how right she was! Even standing it in a corner wouldn't do, for then it suddenly became a shovel again. And, as Gertrude Stein might have said, 'If it wasn't a shovel, what was it?' (That was hard to say, art and life being what they are. When our little exhibition went on a tour, a janitor at a Museum in Minnesota the next winter mistook it for a shovel, as well he might, and went to work on a snowdrift, doing Duchamp's inscription no good.) (Hamilton 30)

The janitor's 'mistake' was to assume that the shovel was *only* what it looked like: useful. In retelling this story to members of the artistic community it is common for them to be incensed by the janitor's mistake, but they too misunderstand the shovel, this time as

[10] The tension between the artist-as-chooser and the artist-as-maker can been seen particularly well in the debate between Walter Arensberg and George Bellows following the submission of *Fountain*, see William A. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917."

useless. It is, frustratingly, both. The shovel's ability to occupy both art and object statuses destroys our ability to imagine or fantasize. Both options are plainly laid out, leaving a decision not a fantasy. We are unable to avoid this positivity of choice; it is forced upon us as spectators. The limits of art that were once obscured behind the pleasure of skill are clearly displayed in the readymade as personal and subjective choice. Artwork now lacks its erotic essence of being veiled, instead it is put on display. Since the technologies of the immunological no longer work without the Other, our engagement with the readymade can only ever hope to sooth neuronal affliction. The unavoidable decision, etymologically related to 'cutting,' determines whether the readymade is art or object on an individual person-to-person and object-to-object basis. This sheds the excess positivity of choice but does not return us to the immunological. Instead it acknowledges the mutual existence of the two. Han's distinction of the immunological and neuronal ages are claims to the predominate immunological afflictions at the beginning of the twentieth century and neuronal at the end. Dada is historically couched in a time when both were, and are still, equally present.

The deft movements of Duchamp's mind do not keep us from falling away from the immunological into the neuronal. Engagement with readymades often stops with its unveiling of the creative act, with its transparency. Transparency's lack of obscuration leaves nothing to the imagination or fantasy. For fantasy to function there must be limits to our access, the Other must be present. As Han says, there is a significant distinction to be made between different kinds of limits:

> Thresholds and transitions are zones of mystery and riddle—here, the atopic *Other* begins […] The fences, or walls, that are being built today no longer

> stimulate fantasy, or fantasies, because they do not generate the *Other*. Instead, they extend through the inferno of the same […] As configurations for shutting out and excluding, such borders abolish *fantasies of the Other*. They no longer constitute *thresholds* or *transitions* leading *somewhere else*. (*The Agony of Eros* 41)

This 'somewhere else' is not somewhere we *are* not; it is somewhere we *can* not be. Categories, be they 'useful' and 'dangerous' or individual properties in a neighbourhood scored by fences, do not present situations in which we *can not* be. Rather, they offer easier identification of where we *could* be. We can see into these spaces, these categories. Such pornographic openness and hypervisibility is the crisis of fantasy, there is too much positivity, too much being seen. The transparency of categories is a neuronal affliction that withers the imagination and creative production. The Dadaists observed this early on.

As a result, Dada's bacteriological language works against the crisis of fantasy to muddy categories and pornographic transparency. However, it would be a mistake to assume this would counteract their suffering. The neuronal afflictions of depression, hyperactivity, exhaustion and so on "elude all technologies and techniques that seek to combat what is alien" (*The Burnout Society* 1). In order to grapple with neuronal suffering, first we must acknowledge it is not alien. Duchamp's inclusion of subjective choice was a significant contribution to art history because of its acknowledgement of neuronal suffering without any attempt to combat it. He draws attention to the issue, attempting to give voice to each sufferer in their individual judgement of the readymade's status as artwork. In this way, the spectator can inscribe their own rules and limits on art.

This is precisely the techniques used by psychotherapists in their attempt to alleviate the neuronal afflictions of their patients. We cannot fight depression as "depression eludes all immunological schemes." We can only listen to it, putting it on display, attempting to rediscover a sense of community to lighten the isolation. In a section of *The Burnout Society*, Han argues that for Alain Ehrenberg, "depression is the pathological expression of the late-modern human being's failure to become himself. Yet depression also follows from impoverished attachment [*Bindungsarmut*], which is a characteristic of the increasing fragmentation and atomization of life in society" (*The Burnout Society* 10). The isolated, subjective interpretations Duchamp cultivates with his readymades are both a response and symptom of the fragmentation Han brings to the fore. Individually, we observe or 'listen' to these objects that fail to become the 'retinal' or aesthetically pleasing art-experience we expect from them. Not only has this (since the advent of conceptual art, at least in part following from Duchamp's 'anti-retinal' artwork) transmuted into the spectator's failure to understand the artwork—a failure to become the knowledgeable and cultured version of the Self—but it emphasizes the 'impoverished attachment' of the categories of art. However, the isolated judgements of readymades eventually congeal into 'posterity,' thus their fragmentation is not without hope of some future union or community. A solution to the crisis of fantasy is suggested here. In a roundabout way, Duchamp's inclusivity and positivity of choice allows for a new opposition to be made. The decision of the spectator cuts through excess positivity and separates out what is art and what is not. Thus, Duchamp's neuronal methodology of the readymade offers a small step back toward the immunological.

The absence of this step leads to spectacle. Making the decision that *In Advance*

of a Broken Arm as an idea, a conception, is 'art' distinguishes certain shovels as art, but does not render them *all* as art. Leaving the decision uncut, as it were, leads the spectator to assume any object, or even experience, *can,* then, be art. To continue along with this assumption is pornographic as it aestheticizes all of life, emptying out the hidden portions of meaning veiled by intention and particular decisions made by artists. Without this, "pornographic, deculturalized images offer nothing to read. They function like advertisements—by direct, tactile, and infectious means" (*The Transparency Society* 28). The directness of the image and the undecided-readymade empties it of what we read *into.* In this way, Han is careless with his words referring to pornographic images as 'infectious.' They are actually 'contagious,' like a thought or propaganda, as they lack the Otherness, which does the infecting. In actuality, the pornographic image is empty: "They empty out into spectacle. The society of pornography is a society of the spectacle," as its emptiness encourages accelerated consumption and exchange (*The Transparency Societ*y 28). This over inundates the spectator with stimulus, clotting their ability to conceive of desires that run deeper than superficial, transparent images.

Neutral Nothingness: Indifference, not Disinterest

Dadaists used the methodology of the spectacle while it was still interpretable as confrontational, that is, immunological. Its infarctions sought to manifest the absurdity and nonsense they saw in the world. It was Tzara's interest, among many others, to continue to confuse the boundaries that distinguished between things, a positive act that destabilized the foundation of the immunological age later finalized in Matzinger's work. As Tzara claims, "I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions

together" (Tzara 36). The affliction or suffering of Dada was due to inflicting excess upon themselves, seeing the tendencies they so vehemently disdained in others, and more broadly within the societies they were part of, in themselves as well. In this way, they were not concerned with the other, but with immanent contradictions—with the Own.

We can see internal contradiction in several performances and personas of Dada: Caberet Voltaire was a raucous bar in Zurich, owned and operated by Dadaist Hugo Ball. Many of the major figures of Dada, such as Tzara, Marcel Janco, Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Hans/Jean Arp, would congregate there to produce scenes of chaos as captured in a jumbled image painted by Janco in 1916, *Cabaret Voltaire*; Arthur Cravan was perhaps not as well-known as many of the other members of Dada, but he embraced the merger of art and life in a way difficult to surpass. A Swiss eccentric and amateur boxer he enjoyed being introduced "with an improbable list of credentials: 'hotel thief, muleteer, snake charmer, chauffeur' and so on," he skirted the Dadaist movement with the support and curiosity of Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, disappearing in 1918 as he set off rowing from Mexico to Buenos Aires (Hopkins 40); André Breton, the future leader of Surrealism, gave a tour of the church Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre on April 14, 1921. An otherwise unimportant and abandoned space, Breton toured a small crowd around the grounds in order to find "the marvellous within the mundane" (Haladyn 102). This event was, by most accounts, a failure as the audience had come to understand the Dadaists as producers of spectacle which supplemented their life rather than disrupted it; and finally, the simultaneous occupation of object and art-object by the readymade provides one signifier with two signifieds. These examples—Cabaret Voltaire, Arthur Cravan, the proto-Surrealist tours

of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, collage and the readymades of Marcel Duchamp—are moments, not of negativity, but excess positivity. Their antics are based on a surplus of sound, identities, spectacle and signifieds, respectively and collectively. What is easily mistaken for negativity in Dada—the lack of sense—is actually excess—nonsense—a clot keeping the momentum of meaning from moving forward. This is perhaps seen most profoundly in Tzara's simultaneous poetry in which multiple speakers recite poems at the same time, overlapping and cancelling out each other's linguistic meaning.[11] Such nonsense is not produced from the lack of sense, but from an excess of sense.

Unlike the artistic movements before it, Dada never sought to become part of the salon or dominant ideology. It never sought acceptance and in this way was never properly rejected making it Other. It was 'dangerous,' though not foreign. "DADA MEANS NOTHING," Tzara exclaims (Tzara 36)—it *signifies* nothing. The emptiness of the 'Dada' signifier functioned in opposition to a saturated immunological perspective. It is a neuronal emptiness. An immunological nothingness would constitute a hostile entity of resistance, a *no*-thing. Nothing, in the Dadaist sense (at least for Tzara), is not a negation of meaning, rather *it is a neutrality to meaning*. Tzara's specific use of '*signifie*' rather than '*sens*' in the original French is significant for its emptiness, not a lack of direction.

It must be made absolutely clear that this emptiness is, in fact, quite full. The belief that 'nothing' is actually empty is what Henri Bergson calls a 'false problem' stemming from words themselves. This is perhaps the reason, or at least *a* reason for

[11] See performance transcript by Richard Huelsenback, Marcel Janco and Tristan Tzara, *L'amiral cherche une maison a louer* (1916).

Tzara's use of '*signifie,*' as he very specifically emphasizes the linguistic feature of both Dada and nothing. "'Nothing' designates the absence of what we are seeking, we desire, expect. Let us suppose that absolute emptiness was known to our experience: it would be limited, have contours, and would therefore be something. But in reality there is no vacuum. We perceive and can conceive only occupied space" (Bergson 102–3). In this way, the negativity of nothing becomes positivized. Thus,

> this so-called representation of absolute emptiness is, in reality, that of universal fullness in a mind which leaps indefinitely from part to part, with the fixed resolution never to consider anything but the emptiness of its dissatisfaction instead of the fullness of things. All of which amounts to saying that the idea of Nothing, when it is not that of a simple word, implies as much matter as the idea of All, with, in addition, an operation of thought. (Bergson 104)

Here, we can begin to see clearly that the 'nothing' Tzara attaches to Dada is a combination of something disinteresting to those who still believe in logic and rationality as well as an excessive positivity through which nothing and everything touch and blur together. Nothing is just too much of something requiring too much effort to engage with.

To return to the distinction between '*signifie*' and '*sens,*' as we see in Duchamp's readymades the doubled signified of *Fountain* as a urinal and as an art-object is not directionless. There are two directions. The readymade is empty of a decision about *which* direction to take, appearing as though it is lacking sense when, in fact, it has too much. Duchamp's relocation of the production of art from a material process to an act of choice—that is, a neuronal act—is very deliberate. In his words, "the choice 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" (Duchamp 141). This quote is in direct relation to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, the birthplace of modern aesthetics.

Kant tells us that to make an aesthetic judgement we must not be biased by our own interests. "One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste" (Kant 43). If we are to claim something as beautiful it must be separate from our interests, which lead us toward a purpose. To say the iridescent coating of pearls is beautiful bears no weight on our ability to achieve the vast majority of purposes we may be interested in. Disagreement on the beauty of a pearl is inconsequential to our ability to live-with, unless this judgement is made with interest, such as if the pearls were a gift. This would certainly be a problem for both the giver and receiver of the pearls. In effect, this means that beauty's uselessness in achieving a purpose is a prerequisite for a judgement of taste.

What is interesting to take note of here is uselessness is *not* a negative to usefulness' positivity. That would lead to *dis*interestedness. The uselessness of *indifference* and the foundation of aesthetic judgement is a neutral position unaffected by personal connection. Those who criticize art for its 'uselessness' swing on a pendulum too excitable for Kant's liking. By seeking objects of visual indifference that conjure no immediate judgements of taste, Duchamp draws upon Kantian indifference making a very deliberate gesture to include the spectator in the creative act. Choosing the most mundane, unremarkable object draws attention to the subjective mechanism behind the aesthetic judgement of artwork. The keystone which supports the two signifieds of

Duchamp's readymades is the use(full/less)ness of the object, the quality of simultaneously being useful and useless.

This simultaneity, in my reasoning, is a direct cause of the neuronal. It is constituted by the possibility of being either useful or useless. This is an important point worth saying twice, the neuronal is constituted, not by the separation of what is and is not useful, but the pluralism engendered by the possibility of being both. Such pluralism lacks a negative side, defining Han's 'achievement society,' which is plagued by freedom of choice. "Unlimited *Can* is the positive modal verb of achievement society. Its plural form—the affirmation, "Yes, we can"—epitomizes achievement society's positive orientation" (*The Burnout Society* 8–9). Arguing for society's 'can-do' attitude, Han is claiming a kind of openness that was once limited by stronger taboos and expectations encapsulated in his counter-term, 'Should.' If 'can' is the modal verb of today, we can certainly find a serious and punning root in Duchamp's readymades, especially *Fountain*; a urinal *can* be both art and object. This simultaneity—neuronal's excess positivity—describes multiple potentialities that do not exist with enough certainty to cast the shadow of negativity. So frequently described as negative, Dada is not a shadow of their time, of World War I's conflict, but a suspension of contrast, understanding and hope. Its nonsense pours out into the early twentieth century as a 'what if…' mistaken as something far more offensive. To be sure, such aggression was present, but it was aimed inwards, towards the Self, at its failures and empty answers.

I-tired

To attempt *bacteriologically* to understanding Dada is to question the nature of Nature as bacteria presumably do not seek recognition but procreation. “If you find it is futile and don’t want to waste your time on a word that means nothing… The first thought that comes to these people is bacteriological in character: to find its etymological, or at least its historical or psychological origin” (Tzara 36). The bacterial ‘first thought’ referenced here by Tzara is infectious to those who wish to make sense of the world: the journalists, academics, scientists and philosophers. What appears on its surface to be a pursuit of recognition, an understanding of what Dada is, turns out to be contagious because it procreates, breeding more questions and frustration. This is not an immunological act against infection from the Other, but a neuronal hyperactive productivity that leads to burnout. Such unending productivity results in exhaustion, or ‘I-tiredness’ as Han calls it. “I-tiredness, as solitary tiredness, is worldless and world-destroying; it annihilates all reference to the Other in favour of narcissistic self-reference” (*The Burnout Society* 36). This is an unhealthy tiredness that no longer trusts in the world. Instead of relaxing *into* something, into the world outside the Self, I-tiredness repeatedly stumbles over itself unable to find *somewhere else* to rest. This is something we will explore in more depth in the next chapter. The internal procreating contradictions of Dada are exhausting to say the least. A strong indicator of the neuronal age.

In Han’s conception of the neuronal, the all-encompassing Self has included the dangerous Other into itself. This does two things. First, the dangerous is always present, but is difficult to identify and locate because recognition comes from conflict with the Other. Without this clear distinction neuronal afflictions, such as exhaustion, appear from

the perpetual imminence of danger. I-tiredness comes from being tired of one's Self, that is, exhausted by the perpetual presence of danger within the Self. Similarly, as the second point, we cannot find somewhere else to set down or relax. There is no 'somewhere else,' only categories of the Same. In this particular case, we do not actually want to reach somewhere else. We want to feel safe. Safe enough to allow our guard down, but to do this 'danger' must be positioned outside of the Self once more, somewhere else. Our inability to rest hinges upon the Other and moments of immunity. We can see this intimated in Duchamp's desire for the individual spectator's judgement. Once a spectator has decided a shovel is or is not art, that is, cut off access to the other option, the stress of engaging with a readymade is quelled. However, this question must continually be asked in order for the spectator to accumulated into posterity, itself an exhausting cumulative 'neurality,' if you will.

The neuronal drives the subject to exhaustion, as it works to be recognized by a non-existent Other, causing burnout and depression. The excess positivity suffocates the subject in itself as it seeks one achievement after another, looking to be rewarded by the Other. Unfortunately, "the lack of relationship to the other causes a crisis in gratification. Gratification as recognition assumes the authority of the other or a third party. It is not possible to reward or recognize yourself" (*Topology of Violence* 26). Louis Aragon leans on his friends for recognition who appear unable to give him a strong sense of who he is, aside from his inconsistencies. The very style he uses is striking for its feeling of a diary entry, having no intended outcome other than to produce, over-produce, and self-reflect while being self-depreciating and depressive. The significance of Aragon's form and content is worth quoting at length:

> Today you find me abominably sad. All that my heart can produce is a damp squib. You won't like that image. I'm already beginning to bore you. I'm not even going to swear at you. Who knows where weariness starts, who knows where it ends? […] All I am aware of nowadays is this great emptiness inside caused by those who are my friends as drops of water in a river are friends of the drop they sweep with them to the sea. If you want to vouch for someone you say: I'm as sure of him as I am of myself. And yet if there's one man on this earth I cannot be psychologically sure of, it's me. I don't take any notice of the rules I set for myself; and this perpetual inconsistency enables others to recognize me and call me by my name; I can't see myself in profile. I'm always betraying myself, letting myself down, contradicting myself. I'm not someone I'd ever put my trust in. No need to despair on that score. But as you know, just one look from my friends is enough to wreck all my plans—that's why we're friends. I give everything up just to waste my time with them, I even drop myself. I suppose you think I bestow on them the trust I refuse myself? Wake up! I know all about their shortcomings, thousands of things about them shock me. They do things I'd never do for all the gold in the world.
>
> I know they have no great affection for me. It's a long time since we stopped carrying those little scales around with us that weigh up a person's worth. I don't believe in my friends just as I don't believe in myself.
>
> ("Sensational Revelations" 195)

Aragon's monologue recognizes his dependency on his friends without acknowledging the Otherness of the immunological modality, as he likens himself and friends to 'drops

in the sea.' Though he does point to a difference between what his friends would do that he would never dream of doing, Aragon is also entirely willing to 'drop himself,' not in selfless sacrifice, but in self-interested busying engagement. The inconsistencies in his writing is a mutation of Han's 'achievement-subject.' Although the Dadaists were unconcerned with the late-capitalist achievements of Han's achievement-subject, they exhibited the same behaviour for different ends. The subject overworks itself because "the feeling of having achieved a goal never occurs," meanwhile there is a sense of being projected toward something, that something is oneself and the satisfaction of oneself (*The Burnout Society* 39–40). This cyclical process of perpetual achievement and redirection is exhausting, never resulting in gratification.

Han's critique of achievement roughly aligns with the Dadaists disdain for logic, science and truth in order to sanitize the "plague produced by intelligence," though this relation should be carefully kept within machinic, computational kinds of intelligence (Tzara 41). It was the Dadaists' interest to escape the confines of politics and sciences driven by just such a logic currently laying waste to Europe. Their intense distrust of logic and support for individualist values was a direction without an aim, a generative act without knowing the outcomes. "Dada; abolition of logic […] Dada; abolition of memory […] Dada; abolition of the future" (Tzara 42). The Dadas collapsed thought, time, space and the Other into its Selves. They did not have somewhere to settle into, to rest, or somewhere else to be. As Aragon said, "there is only me in this world" (Aragon 181). And, following the logic Matzinger presents with her 'useful' and 'dangerous' cells, that world is not fit for relaxation. There is only a thin membrane between the dangerous and the useful and we know we need both. The Dadaists knew this too, though their position

on the cusp of the immunological and the neuronal led them to believe this was freedom and not the imprisonment Han suggests it is.

Tzara ends his manifesto, "Freedom: DADA DADA DADA, a roaring of tense colours, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE" (42). Seemingly, in response, Han ends *The Burnout Society* by writing: "Their life equals that of the undead. They are too alive to die, and too dead to live" (51). The removal of the thresholds of the Other appeared to the Dadaists as freedom, but to Han it is a hybridization of life and death. The 'contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies' of Dada are the zombies of today glued to their smartphones, surrounded by unending advertising, stimulation and spectacle. What we find between the two closing statements of Tzara and Han is a century of transition between two ages Han presents as polarized. However, the immunological and the neuronal are both always present, but with shifting emphasis. From a prioritizing of suffering caused by the Other to suffering caused by our 'Selfs,' the Dadaist fantasy of contradiction strangely worked, but only for the short moment they are able to straddle both of Han's paradigms. They need the 'contra' to their 'diction,' as it were, which art history quickly subsumes into the canon—Art's very own *anti*-art.

Tired Vision: An Adaptation of Byung-Chul Han's Unwritten Neuronal Optics

Immunological Optics

1. Tired Stories

Dada's unique expression of both the immunological and neuronal modalities suggests a unique perspective. Its classification as 'anti-art' within an art historical canon makes this clear as it maintains a supposedly negative position as well as a positive one. This chapter will consider how the Dadaist, Max Ernst, offers two forms of perception within his collage *Murdering Airplane.* To do this, we must first understand Han's 'immunological optics,' his use of sight and related terms and then develop an accompanying 'neuronal optics.'

Immunological perception, laced with negativity, is driven by suffering. It sees with the intention of protection against external, negative forces. In contrast, a purely positive form of perception leads to what Han refers to as 'pornography'—and as 'bingewatching'—which allows everything in, overwhelming the senses. Pornography "maximizes visual information," which, in turn, "intensifies narcissification" as the withholding of information, resistance, negativity, reminds us of Otherness (*The Agony of Eros* 38, 46). Positive perception falls under what Han calls the 'neuronal.' It is excessively positive in the sense that its affliction comes from the additive 'too much,' which manifests as hyperactivity, depression and burnout. In this way, neuronal affliction is self-generated by a hyperactive impulse to do, see and sense everything. The neuronal modality, for Han, is unable to manage negativity that would limit such overwhelming stimulus, which leads to infarctions as everything piles up on itself, overwhelming the subject. Upon a quick reading of his work it appears as though Han argues for actively

instilling elements of negativity into our lives again in order to resist and order excess stimulus into meaning. This gives Han's writing a regressive, pastoral feeling that desires a return to 'the way things were.' Though, in *The Burnout Society*'s discussion of perception, we are able to construct another interpretation of the neuronal, opting for a perception that seeks opportunities to learn rather than censor, consider possibilities rather than linear outcomes, hold multiple interpretations rather than singular absolutes. This is not an inability to manage negativity but a lack of interest in it, turning focus away from conflict and opposition.

Han never explicitly develops the neuronal in a way that allows for learning, which, for him, would be too stimulating to result in meaning. Instead, he rolls learning, knowledge and theory into a relationship with negativity. This falls under the immunological modality. The kind of perception that will be developed in the coming pages stands at odds with what he calls an "immunological optics," which only sees the violence of negativity and loss imposed on the Self from an exterior Other. Such an optics assumes that "everything foreign is simply combated and warded off" (*The Burnout Soceity* 2). For this reason, immunological optics is biased toward seeing conflict and a need for immunity. This excludes the increasing need for an understanding of plurality in our contemporary age. Consequently, Han fails to describe a neuronal optics that sees the violence of positivity with which he is so concerned, instead, he continues to develop perception, particularly of beauty, in terms of militaristic defense by encouraging veiling in the construction of beauty and describing beauty's impact in terms of puncture. Seeing the harmful nature of excess positivity is a pressing concern, which does appear to be Han's career-sized project. It describes the consequences of successfully cultivating

abundance rather than loss or scarcity. It is worrisome that within an immunological perspective positivity is a success and not a risk.

Han's use of 'neuronal' refers to sensory and motor neurons, which may explain why he never develops a neuronal optics. These two types of neurons relate to the neuronal afflictions of hyperactivity, exhaustion and depression. Sensory neurons relay stimulus from sensory organs; thus, they relate to light, sound, touch, smell and taste. Motor neurons also relate to stimulus, governing the control of muscles and glands, which keep us moving for fear of (immunological) death and (neuronal) achievement. This does not correspond with the way Han uses the term 'optics,' which refers to a union of sight and thought. A neuronal 'optics' in Han's usage would be impossible as it would see everything without differentiation or contemplation, thereby *understanding* nothing. "Today, perception itself takes the form of 'bingewatching' […] One goggles oneself unconscious," as he puts it (*The Expulsion of the Other* 2).[12] In contrast to Han's sensory and motor neurons there exists a third type Han has ignored: interneurons. Interneurons connect neurons to one another allowing complex functions such as learning and decision-making. (Inter)neuronal optics that follow the impulse to learn rather than move would reasonably see possibilities to learn, by default enjoying contemplation and play, while also lacking an impulse toward conflict, which only limits interconnection and possibility. This third kind of neuron eludes Han. (Inter)neuronal optics do not necessarily fall victim to the rationality and logic the Dadaists found so abhorrent. This form of connectivity maintains the possibility of escaping the fixed, linear routes of rationalism, leaning toward the transience of play more than the expectations of logic.

[12] Although awkward, this quote is correct to the English translation of *The Expulsion of the Other* by Wieland Hoban. However, 'goggles' and 'googles' are both equally satisfactory to my mind.

2. Defense

(Inter)neuronal optics is counterintuitive for the immunologically minded. Life, as we are commonly told, depends on a balance between negative and positive forces implying the immunological's relationship with negativity is necessary and natural. Thus, the idea of defense is deeply ingrained in us, even within contexts meant to bind us in the most willing of ways. Love, for example, is an experience which binds us to the negativity of another. But "today, love is being positivized into sexuality" (*The Agony of Eros* 12). Thus, love's defences are dissipating in the face of consumption in contemporary society, which "endeavors to eliminate atopic otherness in favor of consumable – *heterotopic* – differences" (*The Agony of Eros* 2). What replaces love, then, is pornography as the Other's body is seen "fragmented into sexual part-objects" (*The Agony of Eros* 12). Differences between the parts are necessarily without 'defense' because they are consumable, but also because they come together to make a whole. Defense would only serve to impede both consumption and unity in the neuronal age.

The consequences of positivizing love are, evidently, confusing. In Badiou's foreword to *The Agony of Eros* he betrays his misunderstanding of Han's non-confrontational, neuronal model by framing Han's intentions within 'defense': "Whatever the case, this remarkable essay, an intellectual experience of the first order, affords one of the best ways to gain full awareness of and join in one of the most pressing struggles of our day: the defense, that is to say – as Rimbaud desired it – the 'reinvention,' of love." (*The Agony of Eros* xi). Han's concern with love is not ours. In fact, it is not his concern either, but a euphemism for eros, the motor of thought, intrigue, friendship and

coexistence with the Other. Badiou's misunderstanding of this is not limited to Han's book, rather it extends to Han's larger project of perceiving the world without the conflict inherent to immunological optics.

A consequence of Han's project is that offense, defense and its failure are no longer an effective way to describe what causes us pain. In the immunological past these kinds of actions came from the negativity of the Other. But now, as one of the main tenets of Han's theories, there is no Other to defend against. As Han says in the *Topology of Violence*, "it does not make sense to strengthen defenses to combat the violence of the same," which is the consequence of losing meaningful difference created by negativity (*Topology of Violence* 93). And as he says in *The Burnout Society*, in the twenty-first century we do not suffer "from the *negativity* of what is immunologically foreign, but from an excess of *positivity*. Therefore, [our illnesses] elude all technologies and techniques that seek to combat what is alien" (*The Burnout Society* 1). Of course, such techniques not only include but necessitate defense, a concept only accessible through an immunological perspective:

> The immunological dispositive, which extends beyond the strictly social and onto the whole of communal life, harbors a blind spot: everything foreign is simply warded off. The object of immune defense is the foreign as such. Even if it has no hostile intentions, even if it poses no danger, it is eliminated on the basis of its *Otherness*. (*The Burnout Society* 1–2)

Badiou's belief that Han is 'defending' love assumes that something is attempting to eliminate love's Otherness—the Otherness of eros. He sees the threat of elimination and the need for defense in Han, but really it is his own immunological optics. Such an optics

fails to meet Han's concern about neuronal affliction, which comes from inside and cannot be defended against. The Otherness of eros is not under siege but its opposite, it is ignored. It is not *gone* as Han provocatively claims. One simply no longer pays attention to it.

This often leads us to "the false impression that [violence] has disappeared," a vital mistake produced by immunological optics. "Martial violence is currently giving way to an anonymized, subjectified, systemic violence that conceals itself as such because it becomes one with society" (*Topology of Violence* vii). The critiques Dada posed to society at the beginning of the twentieth century should not be far from our thoughts here. Although what immediately comes to mind during the commonly recognized period that Dada was active (1916–1920) is likely World War I, obviously a time of horrific physical conflict, Dada is primarily associated with critiques of rationalism. This is what drove Max Ernst to write, "our rage had to find expression somehow or other. This we did quite naturally through attacks on the foundations of the civilization responsible for the war—attack on language, syntax, logic, literature, painting and so forth" (Simmons 243).[13] In their eyes rationalism and the systems of governance in place at that time had failed miserably in achieving what was presumed would be utopias through science and logic. As a consequence, 'martial violence' was not the true perpetrator of suffering, but the 'anonymized, subjectified, systemic violence,' which caused the chain reactions that lead to the war and stupidities that perpetuated it. The

[13] This quotation is taken from Sherwin Simmons' chapter "Dada and Kitsch: Cultivation of the Trivial" in *Virgin Microbes: Essays on Dada*. It was translated from an interview in German between Patrick Waldberg and Max Ernst for *Kunst authentisch*. See *Virgin Microbes* 250.

alliances between nations at the turn of the century was what drew the world into war, and it was an outmoded sense of honour and military tactics posed against new technologies that resulted in the loss of so many lives. We struggle to see this form of violence and subsequently its afflictions because they are not produced by negativity.

Han himself struggles with the aforementioned idea in *Saving Beauty*. Upon considering the nature of beauty, he weaves contradictory thoughts into his project to escape the simple binary of attack-and-defense. His thoughts on 'seeing' lapse into an immunological mode as he describes "*seeing* in the emphatic sense" as always "seeing *differently*, namely, *experiencing*. It is impossible to see differently without exposing oneself to injury" (*Saving Beauty* 33–4). The idea that 'seeing' is intimately related to change is, of course, enticing. Though, the attachment of revelation to injury is a lapse into the immunological optics Han himself is working to point out are obsolescing.

Supposedly, beauty *punctures* through complacency compelling us to act or, to invoke André Breton, convulse. For Han, the experience of beauty, in a profound sense, is one that should provoke us because "the task of beauty, first of all, is to produce stimuli and to generate attention" (*Saving Beauty* 57). This initial task of beauty has become too successful. Reducing it to quick, meaningless and 'smooth' experiences that exist purely as spectacle. Excessively smooth depictions of beauty are pornographic; they exhibit no resistance, in fact, they exhibit everything but resistance. This is precisely what makes them pornographic. Such exhibitionist images are too quickly consumed, lacking any form of depth that might encourage lingering. "Everything is measured by its exhibition value. The society of exhibition is a society of pornography. Everything has been turned outward, stripped, exposed, undressed, and put on show. The excess of

display turns everything into a commodity" (*The Transparency Society* 11). Pornography, in this way, is anything but contemplative. It does not stimulate the neurons. Rather, it shrivels them. Pornography is quickly consumed and forgotten, merely pleasing us. It is the phenomenon of smooth consumption, so smooth that we barely notice it happening.

Injury, on the other hand, as Han and other aestheticians have argued, causes a change in perspective that shocks us out of normalcy by 'deepening' the experience of beauty. It is only in modern thought that we have lost the negativity of beauty, which provides it with its injurious possibility. In Han's reading of Plato, his "metaphysics of beauty is in sharp contrast to the modern aesthetics of beauty; the latter is an aesthetics of pleasure, which confirms the subject in its autonomy and complacency, instead of shocking it" (*Saving Beauty* 29). In this way, true beauty cuts through us, extending beyond the merely calculable into the imaginative and unexpected. Such an incisive experience of beauty 'injures' us because it spurs passion and change via an infection from the external world puncturing through our defenses.

Without the shock and injury of beauty, modern aesthetics has no consequence. It changes nothing. 'Seeing differently' requires a consequential shift in our perception and approach to the world. The solution Han presents to work against pornographic beauty is nostalgic for the immunological: the defence against puncturing vision, though not it the way one might immediately expect. He promotes the erotic, which differs from the pornographic as it defends against the easy access of the eye to all that it desires. In his words, "it is the dress that is divine. The veiling is essential for beauty. Thus, beauty cannot be undressed or unveiled. The impossibility of unveiling beauty is its nature" (*Saving Beauty* 29). But, what Han misses in his description of beauty is precisely what

he begins with in this quotation, namely, the dress. Perhaps, it really is the dress that is divine, and it is the fluttering of the fabric that is beautiful.[14] With this suggestion it would be easy to claim provocatively that it is the act of unveiling that is beautiful and by its nature also fleeting. Doing this would only serve to send us back into the language of defense as we cover and uncover, falling into the same trap as Han. Focusing on the unveiling of what is hidden by the dress is only an overcoming of the dress' resistance; this is not beauty, but an opposition, a conflict, and does not define a (inter)neuronal perception. So, instead I turn our attention specifically to the flutter of the dress, that is, the movement of it as it exists in the world and all of its complexity, not as an abstracted element which art so frequently becomes.[15] A flutter is playful, not defensive. Rather than caused by the actions or implications of negativity or injury, a flutter of the dress is the consequence of connections between the wind, body and the fabric itself. It cannot be adequately explained with the language of attack-and-defense. If an immunological optics sees immunological beauty that punctures and injures in order to provoke a change within the Self, then a (inter)neuronal optics sees beauty as it draws connections between different elements that are themselves always already in flux. Seeing in this way is not a gaze that undresses or unveils or requires the mechanism of defense, but is instead an

[14] Han's combined use of the 'dress,' 'penetration' and the erotic is extremely problematic. In my following development of a fluttering dress as playful and beautiful I had in mind a non-gendered dress, simply imaging the movement of fabric as a toga, kilt or the skirt of a bed. What lies underneath the dress should have no influence on the observations of the fabric itself.

[15] Art's tendency to be abstractions of and abstracted from the world deserves to be explained at length, which it often has been in studies of the museum and its functions such as with Douglas Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* and Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.

observation with the intent to learn, in the broadest sense of the word, about the intricacies of the world as it is.

(Inter)neuronal Optics

1. Perception

Han devotes a specific section of *The Burnout Society* to 'seeing.' "The Pedagogy of Seeing" develops the *vita contemplativa* as a counterpoint to Hannah Arendt's interest in the *vita activa.*[16] This mirrors a tendency in all of his writing toward revitalizing contemplation in an age of noise, distraction and a compulsion to *do*. Such hectic movement leads to burnout, an exhaustion without end. One is unable to take a slow, tired gaze that "rouses a special kind of visibility" in which "everything becomes extraordinary" (*The Burnout Society* 32) or one achieves a 'tired vision' in which "things flicker, twinkle, and vibrate at the edges." Han claims tiredness "lends them an *aura of friendliness*," though it follows from *The Burnout Society*'s development of the neuronal and over-stimulation that it lends things a sense of wonder as well (*The Burnout Society* 33). A truly *tired* subject, as opposed to an exhausted 'I-tired' subject, which we will return to later, is not without the ability to wonder and contemplate; rather, the tired

[16] Han has adapted Arendt's understanding of *action* here to his own benefits, as he often does by cherry picking from the thinkers he cites. This can be misleading, but also generative, provoking new lines of thought and conversation, which I believe to be centre to Han's writing style. That is to say, many may condemn his selective reading of philosophers for straying for the normal model of academic writing. Here, Han has collapsed Arendt's distinctions between *action*, *labour* and *work* under one term while glazing over the subtle—and sometimes explosive—consequences of action that would inevitably lead to contemplation.

subject has the negative capability not to act, intentionally choosing to divert their energies toward observation and thought.

The negative capacity to filter external stimuli is an inherently immunological quality. First, it requires a sense of an outside. Second, it requires a resistance or immunity to the Other, which the *vita contemplativa* filters. The *vita contemplativa* is "not a matter of passive affirmation and being open to whatever happens. Instead, it offers resistance to crowding, intrusive stimuli," which begins to muddy the dualistic mind-body split implied by the 'immunological' and 'neuronal' terms Han introduces at the beginning of the book (*The Burnout Society* 21). It is the capacity for the *vita contemplativa* to say no, just as it is the capacity of the immune system to reject what makes Han's concept of thought (as well as beauty) immunological.

To return to Han's use of Arendt, he criticizes her work by claiming that "it escapes her notice that the loss of the ability to contemplate—which, among other things, leads to the absolutization of *vita activa*—is also responsible for the hysteria and nervousness of modern society" (*The Burnout Society* 20). "It is hyperactive and hyperneurotic" (*The Burnout Society* 18). Thus, activity turns into hyperactivity, which in turn keeps us too busy to contemplate. We have too much of what Han calls "positive potency," which is "the power to do something," while we lack the balance of "negative potency," or "the power not to do," which keeps our senses from being "utterly at the mercy of rushing, intrusive stimuli and impulses" (*The Burnout Society* 24). Tristan Tzara's claim in his "Dada Manifesto 1918" that 'Dada means nothing' is a desire for negative potency. Interrupting the signification of a specific meaning causes a pause. It breaks up the intentionality of communication. Tzara is pointedly expressing Dada's

interest in saying ‘no’ to rational meaning. Being able to slow down, reflect and think are qualities of negative potency that provide agency to resist the bulldozing effect of incessant modern life.

This is what learning to see means for Han: “making yourself capable of deep and contemplative attention, casting a long and slow gaze” (*The Burnout Society* 21). In this way, sight and thought are intimately related, in fact, they meet under the term ‘perception.’ This explains why “The Pedagogy of Seeing” deals very little with actual optics; for Han, seeing is inextricably bound up with thinking. When he later claims in *The Agony of Eros* that the vanishing of borders and thresholds are causing a “contemporary crisis in literature and the arts,” Han is not referring to actual borders, but to conceptual limits (41). This supports a reading that ‘the disappearance of the Other,’ which is the constituting agent of borders and thresholds is more about appearance than actuality. The neuronal mode, which has led to the crisis, does not perceive the Other or its limits, producing a problem of trying to think outside a box that for all intents and purposes does not appear to exist.

The fences, walls, trenches, mountain ranges, seas, and rivers that no longer constitute thresholds of the Other are not *unable* to be thresholds; rather, they lack the ritualistic, narrative context that imbues space and concepts with limits. “In all rites of passages, one dies a death in order to be reborn beyond the threshold” (*The Expulsion of the Other* 34). But how many of us today believe in spiritual death strongly enough to appear ‘beyond the threshold,’ on the other side? Never mind that rites of passage are constructed by communities and ours is an impatient ‘swarm’ of individuals intent upon

smooth experiences that contain no negativity, pain and certainly not death.[17] Similarly, the detestation of hybridity expressed in monstrous werewolves and chimeras of old are concerned with the transgression of thresholds much harder to find in the contemporary 'cyborg' of Donna Haraway. Han's project, then, is to think the world without those thresholds that once regulated the way we 'see' the world and its parts as Other. That is, the way we *think* the world, both in and out of being. His claim that there is a 'crisis' in the arts stemming from the inability to see the Other is misleading. It implies the production of fine art and literature no longer meets with or generates the Other when it is more accurate to say the spectator no longer uses an 'optics' to be able to perceive the Other, negativity or *somewhere else*.

2. Special Vision

The capacity for thought is absolutely essential for cultivating anything that escapes the trap of excess positivity and neuronal affliction. The abundance of *vita activa* causes us to be run down, burnt out and depressed because of our hyperactivity, hypervisibility and hyperaesthesia. In the hyper "everything is mixed with everything else. The boundaries between inside and outside become increasingly *permeable*" (*The Expulsion of the Other* 35). Designated spaces and times for rest are equally meant for work, never allowing for

[17] The use of 'swarm' is in reference to Han's book *In the Swarm*; "The new mass is the *digital swarm*. Its features distinguish it radically from the *crowd*—the classical form that the many assumed. The digital swarm does not constitute a mass because no *soul*—no *spirit*—dwells within it. The soul gathers and unites. In contrast, the digital swarm comprises isolated individuals. […] Individuals who come together as a swarm do not develop a *we*. No harmony prevails—which is what welds the crowd together into an active entity. Unlike the crowd, the swarm demonstrates no internal coherence" (10).

tired vision to set in. Just because I find myself in bed, watching TV, after a few glasses of wine on the weekend does not mean telemarketers and emails from work will not find me as well. Without the time or place for a slow, tired gaze to take stock of the situation, the various perspectives, opinions, ideas—not to mention the beautiful play of things as they exist around us—we continually over- and re-produce our afflictions. Our own compulsion to over-work kicks up dust that inhibits our own ability to perceive.

The benefits of a special vision granted by tiredness are lost on the neuronally afflicted achievement-subject that cannot rest. The achievement-subject "works for pleasure and does not act at the behest of the Other. Instead, it hearkens mainly to *itself* […] In this way, it rids itself of the negativity of the 'commanding [*gebietender*] Other'" (*The Burnout Society* 38). Without the Other, the achievement-subject experiences another crisis, this time of gratification. No longer subjected to work for a master but compelled to work for itself—for its own achievements—the achievement-subject works without stopping. "Because the structure of gratification has been disturbed, the achievement-subject feels compelled to perform more and more" (*The Burnout Society* 38). Han describes the consequences of this as 'I-tired.'

Such an I-tired subject is so exhausted, so overloaded, so overworked that it is "incapable of doing *something*"—anything (*The Burnout Society* 33). I-tiredness "is worldless, world-destroying tiredness" (*The Burnout Society* 32). It is isolated and isolating, unable to relax into the world because of its expansive ego. It is hard to put your head down in your own lap, as it were. Such a subject does not *lack* wakefulness, rather it is unable to let go of it. It is effectively undead; to quote Han's closing sentiment from *The Burnout Society*, "they are too alive to die, and too dead to live" (51). This

stands in contrast to what novelist and playwright Peter Handke, calls 'we-tiredness,' which stems from communal labour in the pursuit of a common goal and the negative potency to reject purpose-driven activity. In practice, this appears to Handke in his childhood memories such as observing a carpenter's lunch break, during which they casually swap stories or talk about the weather, or, as an adult, a sleepless red-eye flight leading to a day of indifferently watching the passers-by in a new city. For Handke, this is specifically geared toward creating a restful space for storytelling and listening, largely due to a form of perception interested in sharing time together. For Han's purposes, tiredness contains a form of perception uninterested in conflict and inherently aimed toward negative potency.

Tiredness contains a portion of negativity for Han that is not part of positive exhaustion. The exhausted simply collapse while the tired rest in what we can call a kind of liminal state that pauses between the extremes of hyperactivity and coma. Han is not remiss to note an immunological optics in his section "The Society of Tiredness" as it is here that he begins to describe the initial groundwork for a neuronal optics that sees potential and wonder in the world-that-is in a playful way that escapes the binary of attack-and-defense, as well as positivity and negativity. With tiredness a unique form of fantasy appears, which is not based on being 'somewhere else' but is grounded in the reality in which we currently occupy. As Handke says, "'fantasy' comes to the ideally tired man but is different from the fantasy of the sleepers in the Bible or the *Odyssey*, who have visions: without visions his fantasy shows him what is" (Handke 40). The distinction Handke draws between visions and fantasy highlights an antiquated assumption that a higher power—the Other—is opening a window onto somewhere else;

rather, the hallucinatory fantasy of tiredness draws attention to the details of life as it is here now, without embellishment.

I believe this is the initial seed for Han's surprising statement made in *The Agony of Eros* that there is a 'crisis in the arts':

> When borders and thresholds vanish, *fantasies of the Other* disappear too. The contemporary crisis in literature and the arts stems from a crisis of fantasy: the *disappearance of the Other* […] The fences, or walls, that are being built today no longer stimulate fantasy, or fantasies, because they do not generate the *Other* […] They no longer constitute *thresholds* or *transitions* leading *somewhere else*. (*The Agony of Eros* 41)

To draw a relationship between this bold claim and Handke's tired perception suited for storytelling, 'fantasies of the Other,' as Han calls them, are the stories shared by other people—that is, (an)Other's fantasies. In this way, the 'crisis' we are undergoing is one of loneliness which, whether due to traditional grand narratives or something else, leads us to believe that the Other will unify us through war, patriotism, visions or some other means. I hesitate to mention myth as well because for Handke myth would be a wonderfully appropriate means to achieve fantasy. The telling of myths, or more appropriately the tired moments in which storytelling is most effective, is a kind of lens through which we see the world as it is. What we have instead is burnout. Burnout does not allow us to communally relax and share such stories, instead seeking isolated activities that hardly constitute rest and make no room for the fantastical, yet simple, flutter of a dress.

3. Tired Vision

The term ‘neuronal’ points toward perceptual shifts needed for a new optics that sees or, more accurately, thinks the violence of positivity. Immunological optics is unable to see the afflictions created by excess positivity because of its disposition toward the tactics of attack and defense. This way of seeing no longer makes sense—both in terms of sensation and thought—when affliction is produced by internal drives that cause us to overwork and burnout. As Han explains, “neuronal violence leading to psychic infarctions is a terror of immanence. It differs radically from horror that emanates from the foreign in the immunological sense. Medusa is surely the immunological Other in its extreme form. She stands for radical alterity that one cannot behold without perishing in the process” (*The Burnout Society* 6). The mere idea of ‘seeing’ Medusa is horrifying in the story. It strongly influences the way Perseus behaves in her lair, encouraging him to find a new means of seeing. He picks up a bronze shield and uses its reflection to see the world in reverse. Although this changes the nature of his sight it does not change the nature of his perception. He still sees the shield as a form of defense while seeking to attack the Medusa. Perseus’ aggressiveness and limited range of action (attack and defense) is the immunological modality.

“Neuronal violence, on the other hand, escapes all immunological optics, for it possesses no negativity. The violence of positivity does not deprive, it saturates; it does not exclude, it exhausts. That is why it proves inaccessible to unmediated perception” (*The Burnout Society* 6–7). But what is ‘unmediated perception’? Scientifically and materially speaking, mediation has been an inseparable feature of vision for centuries, if not always-already stipulated. Galileo, the telescope, Kepler, the invention of the lens and

later the scientific instruments of the nineteenth century such as the thaumatrope, phenakistiscope, zootrope, stereoscope and kaleidoscope prove that vision is a mediated sense, if not by the physics of light and electrical impulses, then by the mind. Assuming that Han is aware of this history, this is not a moment in which he is conflating optics and perception, but is specifically referring to the union of sight and thought. In order to get a sense of what 'unmediated perception' might be we must turn to Jonathan Crary in his book *Techniques of the Observer*, in which he makes an important distinction between the 'spectator' and the 'observer.'

'Spectator' has a specific connotation, Crary argues, "namely, of one who is a passive onlooker at a spectacle" whereas 'observer' "means 'to conform one's action, to comply with,' as in observing rules, codes, regulations, and practices. Though obviously one who sees, an observer is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations" (*Techniques* 5–6). In this way, 'unmediated perception' is the passive positivity of spectatorship that cannot see neuronal violence because it is unable to see the laws that govern its suffering, mistakenly attributing suffering to effects of immunological attacks. Immunological optics is unable to see the 'rules, codes, regulations, and practices' of the neuronal mode. It stares blankly onto excess positivity seeing only success.

The 'success' of positivity is what concerns Han and it appears later in another of Crary's books. In *24/7*, he interrogates the temporality of 24/7 capitalist culture, believing sleep represents a threshold that still offers some protection against aggressive neoliberalism. Sleep still leads *somewhere else*. However, the omnipresence of electric light threatens this threshold. Its perpetuity burns away any possibility of a 'shaded

domesticity' and private sphere. It exposes everything under its harsh light, literally and figuratively. The constant buzz of florescent light and screens allow both day and night to be coopted by work. The 24/7 worker dissipates the natural order of their circadian rhythm. This should sound familiar as it was Han's reason for criticizing Arendt's *vita activa-cum*-hyperactivity, which he feels reduces life to 'bare life' through a perpetual compulsion to work and the destruction of a meaningful sense of time. As Crary writes: "24/7 denotes the total wreckage of the day as much as it concerns the extinguishing of darkness and obscurity. Desolating any luminous conditions expect those of functionality, 24/7 is part of an immense incapacitation of visual experience" (*24/7* 33). The perpetuity of light for Crary is not only the erosion of play, leisure, and relaxation into machinic productivity, but also the erasure of our last point of resistance against neoliberalism. It is hard to commoditize 'unproductive' sleep. In this way, Han's I-tiredness and Crary's 24/7 culture are virtually identical. Both refuse the possibility of tired vision. For both Han and Crary, we suffer from hyperactivity and the hypervisible.

The disappearance of thresholds, such as tiredness, that would traditionally filter perceptual input through observation of certain rules, such as when and when not to work, has created an affliction of too much stimulation. Instead, sheer exhaustion has replaced tiredness in which there is no gradation between the intensified poles of hyperactivity and the full stop of comatose power naps. This is the 'immense incapacitation of visual experience' Crary references. Every visible image is limited to function. Such an inundation of information and excess stimulus, "radically changes the structure and economy of attention. Perception becomes fragmented and scattered" as we superficially skim rather than deeply contemplate (*The Burnout Society* 12). This clogs

our ability to playfully see onto somewhere else. Instead, we are compelled to see everything unceasingly:

> Today, faced with the sheer volume of hypervisible images, we can no longer *shut our eyes*. The rapid succession of images leaves no time to do so, either. Shutting your eyes is *negativity*, which does not pair well with the positivity and hyperactivity of contemporary acceleration society […] this also accounts for the achievement-subject's nervous exhaustion. (*The Agony of Eros* 40)

Letting everything in overwhelms the achievement-subject. It never learned to see, as it were. This is why Han puts such emphasis on the union of sight and thought in "The Pedagogy of Seeing": "learning to see means 'getting your eyes used to calm, to patience, to letting things come to you'" (*The Burnout Society* 21, in part quoting Nietzsche). Without this lesson, Han's positive subject does not have negative potency. It is unable to not be able, as Han would say, to see sheer functionality. Continual, uncritical consumption of stimulus is the aim. In this light, it is difficult to call this form of seeing 'perception.' It lacks a union with thought that draws the distinction between sight and perception.

This lacks any sense of wonder or pause created by tired vision. The eyes of 24/7 culture are exhausted; their bleariness lack any of the wonder of tired eyes. Exhaustion does not leave room for wonder, curiosity or play. It does not take the time to relax back into the world with others. Relaxing with others requires 'we-tiredness' that is a shared and trusting tiredness, which loosens "the strictures of the ego" allowing us to melt back into the world (*The Burnout Society* 31). "This tiredness," Han says, "founds a deep friendship and makes it possible to conceive of a community that requires neither

belonging nor relation. Human beings and things show themselves to be connected through a friendly *and*" (*The Burnout Society* 33). With this approach, tiredness escapes the neuronally afflicted 'and' that leads to hyperactivity and crushes contemplation. Instead, "tiredness enables the human being to experience singular calm, serene not-doing. It is not a state in which the senses languish or grow dull. Rather, it rouses a special kind of visibility" (*The Burnout Society* 32). It escapes what Crary calls 24/7's 'paucity of tonal differentiation'. We-tiredness 'inspires'. There is a kind of magic to tired perception. So, tiredness may indeed be a threshold onto the Other as Crary suggests.[18] But this threshold is not something to be fought with. It's something to relax *into* or *with*.

Crary's belief that sleep is the last remaining uncommodifiable threshold in contemporary life is a romantic one. But so too is Han's notion of a tired vision with a special capacity for friendliness. In *Techniques of the Observer,* Crary makes a point of stressing his interest in the 'observer' over the 'spectator'. Though, his observer stems from a focus on "a complex remaking of the individual as observer into something calculable and regularizable," which held human vision as "something measurable" more than a qualitative experience (*Techniques* 17). This quantified perception, following specific rules and regulations, matches closely to Han's fear of calculation. Derived from statistics, calculation appears to be rapidly replacing theory and deep contemplation in

[18] Han offers a remarkably similar series of observations as Crary three years earlier in the original, German edition of *The Burnout Society, Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*. In the English edition Han suggests tiredness "reestablishes the 'duality' that solitary tiredness destroys utterly" (32).

the minds of the general public and the technologies industries which lead it.[19] Such mechanical 'thinking' dissolves a little with tiredness, becoming somewhat hallucinogenic: "Deep tiredness loosens the strictures of identity. Things flicker, twinkle, and vibrate at the edges. They grow less determinate and more porous and lose some of their resolution. This particular in-difference lends them an *aura of friendliness*" (*The Burnout Society* 33). It is on this same note that Crary ends *24/7* believing that with tiredness we will find "different places, in many disparate states, including reverie or daydream." The slight distancing nourished by tiredness needs a romanticism to make things magical and 'twinkly' enough to bother dreaming up. Perhaps what is most compelling about this argument is its normality. Like observing the flutter of a dress, tired vision does not require work or exceptional circumstances but a soft willingness to pause; as Crary says, "sleep which, at the most mundane level of everyday experience, can always rehearse the outlines of what more consequential renewals and beginnings might be" (*24/7* 128).

4. Murdering Airplane

Max Ernst understood tiredness as a way to see elusive possibilities. This is made clear in his writing "Visions of Half-Sleep," first published in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1927, in which he describes a hallucinatory tired vision which can be traced throughout his

[19] See Han's chapter "The End of Theory" in *The Agony of Eros*: "Not long ago, Chris Anderson—the editor-in-chief of *Wired*—published a provocative article entitled "The End of Theory." In it, he claimed that the inconceivably large volumes of data now available have made theoretical models entirely superfluous […] There is no such thing as *data-driven* thinking. Only calculation is data driven. The negativity of the incalculable is inscribed in thinking. As such, it is prior and superordinate to 'data,' which means 'things given'" (48-9).

oeuvre as inspiration. Staring at a false mahogany panel, Ernst describes fantastical scenes that engage with a "well-known game of purely optical representations which obsesses us in half-sleep" to find visual possibilities that affected him "for a long time afterward" (*Beyond Painting* 4). Much like Han's use of 'optics,' his 'visions of half-sleep' are shifts in perception and ways of thinking much more than they are actually about sight. Normally, seeing such things as Ernst discovers with tired vision would be buried under fully awake interpretations of the world that are limited to rational understandings.

In order to see tired vision at work, we should turn to one of Ernst's earliest collages as it offers a unique pivot point for our two forms of optics, immunological and (inter)neuronal. *Murdering Airplane* (1920) is inextricably attached to the First World War and its immunological consequences, though in Ernst's depiction there exists an (inter)neuronal way of perceiving that does not necessitate the attack-and-defense disposition of the immunological.

Undoubtedly, Ernst and the Dadaists attacked many things. The methodology of collage is itself a revolt against painting by doing away with the paint brush and the skill of rendering an image with careful study. As Raoul Hausmann said about the development of photomontage,

> the first to practice photomontage, the Dadaists, shared the viewpoint—unshakably for them—that wartime painting, postfuturist expressionism, had failed because of its non-objectivity (its choice of the non-figural), its lack of engagement, and its conceptual vacuum, and that not only painting but all genres

> and all artistic techniques needed a radical transformation to bring them in contact with the life of the era. (Hausmann and Cullars 67)

Similarly, André Breton said, "the invention of photography has dealt a mortal blow to the old modes of expression, in painting as well as poetry […] we do not hesitate to see in Max Ernst a man of these infinite possibilities" (*Beyond Painting* 177). Collage as it differs from photomontage instead steals from the world of mass-produced images in order to construct itself as a hybrid, which Han believes is a symbol of contemporary life. He refers to this state as a "general promiscuity" in the "absence of immunological effective[ness]." "Hybridization—which dominates not just current culture-theoretical discourse, but also the feeling of life in general—stands diametrically opposed to immunization. Immunological hyperaesthesis would not allow hybridization to occur in the first place" (*The Burnout Society* 3). But, in *Murdering Airplane* we find no explicit imagery of immune defense; rather, we find collaboration in Ernst's methodology. Unlike many of the other Dada collages, Ernst's images come together in unity instead of a disjointed mass, as exemplified in the collages of Raoul Hausmann or George Grosz.[20] Regardless of who made it, collage works are read as *an image* in which its diverse parts work together as a whole. This cannot be explained within an immunological paradigm nor with Han's use of 'neuronal' as it refers to movement and stimulus. It must be explained in terms of connectivity and interneurons.

Moving beyond the methodology of collage and toward the image itself, there is a strong implied narrative of conflict, if for no other reason than the title, *Murdering*

[20] Hannah Höch's work also bears the same kind of artistry and skill as Ernst. Both artists composed aesthetically pleasing work, which, contrasts what many of the Dadaists intentionally avoided.

Airplane. The airplane itself sits at the center of the image. The plane appears to be metamorphizing into what Francis Picabia called the 'mechanomorph,' a human machine hybrid with human arms whose shoulders bump the front of the plane into a crooked position. This imbues the front of the plane, as it sits on human shoulders, with the quality of a head. Meanwhile, in the bottom left corner of the image, two soldiers carry their wounded, legless comrade out of frame. The landscape behind them is completely barren and grey. All human features have a yellow tinge while the environment and plane are colourless.

Presumably, the injured soldier was injured by the 'murdering airplane.' But, upon closer inspection, the soldiers do not seem rushed as might be expected of a victim so closer to its attacker. The soldiers do not grimace or worry either. There is a tangible sadness, but they are not running in fear from the murdering airplane. Instead, they slowly wander off. In fact, it appears as though they may be standing still, taking a break from their labour and duty. The plane itself appears to writhe in mid-air or perhaps dance or maybe even sleep. The position of the arms and 'head' suggest the posture of lying down. The direction and gestures of the plane lead away from the soldiers. This mechanical creature appears self-interested, leading one to believe any harm it may have caused was likely unintentional and indifferent. This, I imagine, done in the same manner as a sleeper knocking over a glass while in bed. In this way, the same action can be described as an attack on a glass of water or soldiers as easily as an inadvertent gesture made while wrapped in 'half-sleep.'

Moving our attention to the background we find no barricades or pits blasted into the ground by shells, just a smooth expanse of grey. Though the airplane is certainly

meant to be understood as the Other, which is an unavoidable part of Ernst's thinking appearing often in his writing and artwork, it also appears as the Self. Ernst's interest in psychology cannot be ignored here.[21] The manifestation of this murdering airplane should be understood as psychological. Its representation leaning heavily toward what we might assume the perception of tired soldiers would manifest as they looked up from their trenches toward humming grey skies. An experience Ernst likely had while serving at the Western front between July 1915 and March 1916 before sustaining a head injury from the recoil of his own gun (appropriately neuronal).[22]

Murdering Airplane's ambiguous movements are enigmatic, escaping any concrete answers or intentions. Mystery like this does not fall within the neuronal framework of positivity or the hyper. However, the distinction between Han's modes begin to blur somewhere in this airplane. The psychological horror is equally spectacle. Though, the soldiers do not seem rushed nor interested in combat. The psychological manifestation Ernst has rendered here balances between the two modalities depending on which optics we apply to it. (Inter)neuronal optics and tired vision encourage us to see the tiredness and depression depicted while being able to draw connections between the parts. Between the soldiers and the plane, between the landscape and figures, between the artwork, its historical context and we as spectators (inter)neuronal optics observes the interconnected nature of these elements. Immunological optics, on the other hand, will find conflict between the soldiers and their 'murderer,' between the human and machine

[21] Ernst studied psychology at Bonn University until the outbreak of World War I.
[22] In fairness, this was not the extent of Ernst's military career. In his own biographical notes published in *Beyond Painting,* Ernst refers to his military service extending from 1914–1918 in bland terms. "Boredom of military life and warfare. Very little work" (vii).

parts of the airplane as they cause the arms to writhe in pain, between the historical context and the landscape as a desolate war-torn battlefield. Both perspectives hold equal merit in *Murdering Airplane*.

In sum, both 'optics' have a specific role to play. Immunological optics allows for the capacity to see conflict, suffering and injury as exhibited in Ernst's collage. (Inter)neuronal optics offers a playful eye for learning more about the systemic issues that we reproduce in ourselves. As Han, Handke, Crary and Ernst suggest, tiredness offers the opportunity to see differently in a profound sense without necessitating injury. We can wonder with tired eyes at the soldiers' ability to come together in the midst of a multitude of afflictions. We can see the fantastic half-sleep imagery of the airplane that itself appears to be caught between the posture of sleep and an Other-worldly dance. Applying a (inter)neuronal optics, which escapes the 'bingewatching' limitations of Han's motor and sensory neurons, to *Murdering Airplane* opens the possibility to see the Other—the deathly airplane—as more than an enemy, other than Other, but a fellow sufferer, an engineering wonder of humanity somehow managing to stay aloft in the air, or a dress caught by the energies of the wind. (Inter)neuronal optics encourages us to see the afflictions we suffer from today, not as conflict, but as excess. Dada's interest in excess displays an awareness of the 'neuronal' one hundred years earlier than Han's writings, but with a flexibility Han claims we have now lost. Not only more optimistic than Han, Dada's tiredness with negativity moves toward seeing the possibility for fantasy in the here and now, in the details, in the excess positivity of the ways things are interconnected, rather than in conflict with one another.

The Excess Positivity of Possibilism: Marcel Duchamp, Possibility and the Affliction of Too Much

Traditionally speaking, that is, immunologically speaking, our immunological optics have provided us a sense of direction. The possibility of the future has depended on overcoming the limitations of today. Perhaps the future will be different, if we overcome the limitations of the present, from which a sense of progress may emerge. Though, as Marcel Duchamp puts it, "progress is merely an enormous pretension on our part," because, at least for art, what we refer to as progress is only the shifting tides of "fashion" and taste (*Essential Writings* 123). This is an (inter)neuronal perspective, which puts all artistic forms of expression and fantasy in relation to one another as alternative possible forms that do not negate or conflict but exist alongside as playful, possible techniques.

However, the multiplicity of alternative forms of expression creates a problem of 'too much,' which writer and film maker Hito Steyerl has referred to as "the shrapnel of former images" that "covers the surface of the world" (Steyerl 18). The plethora of possible images halt our access to a strong sense of an actual world. Fragments of images, or more accurately, interpretations, which require a learned understanding of what such images *mean,* afflict us with depressing knowledge such that one style or fashion does not necessarily have more access to the real than any other. Duchamp saw this early on while living in a world that "was forever changing and becoming increasingly unstable, a world in which all hope of certainty and lasting values was fading rapidly, all these painters [Kandinsky, Kupka, Mondrian, Malevich] were striving to discover in art a truth which was timeless, irrefutable, eternal […] Duchamp's idea went in exactly the opposite direction" (Molderings 16). Moreover, each subjective

experience of a fashion (or an image) cannot be relied upon to create a consistent meaning amongst multiple people. This is, in part, what I believe Richard Huelsenbeck meant by his famous claim that art is forever "picking up the pieces from yesterday's crash" (Huelsenbeck 40). As a result, it would be unfortunate, truly, to see those pieces as something to be put back together again as they once were. Instead, 'yesterday's crash' provides us with the building blocks of today, *if* we use (inter)neuronal optics as a means of seeing the world playfully. Failing to do so only makes us implicit in misunderstanding a fundamentally fragmented reality. Neuronal affliction, then, is a pressing concern as it originates directly from the misattribution of an immunological response to neuronal systems, which fold our attention and energies back onto ourselves, recreating our pain. We can see such a misattribution specifically in the resistance to Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) existing as *both* art *and* object.

When he submitted *Fountain* to The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (often referred to, in short, as the 'Independents show') we can now, using our understanding of immunological and (inter)neuronal optics, see the neuronal clashing with the immunological. His submission, and the first appearance of the readymade, was intended to test the Independents' inclusive vision of staging an exhibition without a jury. The controversy this caused has since become a significant, if not the most significant, moment in twentieth century art history. For our purposes, this is because of the readymade's unique expression of the possible. His so-called 'possiblism' lacks the negativity and limit of the impossible.

This same idea repeatedly appears in Han's writings as he distinguishes between the 'Can' and the 'Should,' modal verbs that emphasize the possibility or impossibility of

action. The proliferation of possibilities in Duchamp's work collides with the actual, material world, oversaturating it with neuronal connections causing affliction that, curiously, are mixed with immunological features. Such a mixture does not exist in Han's writing and merits some exploration. Duchamp is particularly useful for addressing this gap in Han's thought because of the controversy his readymades produced, first exhibited in 1917. I argue, it is because of the readymade's immanent possibilities clashing with immunological ideology, which states something such as art should remain fixed within a limited definition, that these artworks have persisted as a relevant topic for research and development.

We will work through the unique positivity and presentism of Duchamp's 'possibilism' and Han's negative beauty to understand why possibilism 'burns away aesthetics.' Although Han's negative beauty is a retreat from actually addressing his new 'paradigm' of positivity, there are similarities between his thought and Duchamp's when it comes to the experience of time. The erotic concealment Han outlines, as opposed to pornographic exposure, creates a point of contemplation unfolding over time for the viewer, something more cerebral, which we find again in Duchamp as 'delay' and 'indecisive reunion.' Delay differs drastically from Han's erotic concealment. It is constructed from excess positivity. However, the erotic—eros—offers us a way of understanding the mechanism at work in Duchamp's conception of the creative act. Eros is invigorating force that bridges the divide between Self and Other, allowing them to work together rather than seeking to destroy one another. This is of radical importance for Duchamp's understanding of art and begins to explain how the gap that exists

between Self and Other has been filled in, when the two have not been merged as described in the first chapter.

Duchamp introduced the simple act of choice as the primary medium of all artists. This reduction, of course, enraged many of his contemporaries and created the controversy that made *Fountain* not just famous, but infamous. But what likely made it even more difficult for them was the flexibility of decision this choice brought with it. Consequently, the neuronal affliction of 'too much' becomes all too evident as the urinal-*Fountain* can just as easily belong in the bathroom as the gallery, and back again! This, put plainly, is just *too much*.

Possibility

In a note from 1913 Duchamp writes:

> Possible
>
> The figuration of a possible.
>
> (not as the opposite of impossible
>
> nor as related to probable
>
> nor as subordinated to likely)
>
> the *possible* is only
>
> a *physical "caustic"* [vitriol type]
>
> burning up all aesthetics or callistics. (*Essential Writings* 73)

Duchamp's possible has nothing to do with prediction, which relates to probability and likeliness. It is not concerned with what might happen in any actual sense. For this

reason, it differs from Derrida's 'perhaps,' which describes a potential future, "there will come, *perhaps*; there will occur, perhaps, the event of that which arrives" (Derrida 28). Duchampian possibility lives in the present as a field of *possible choices.* Its antithesis, the impossible, has been detached and extracted. Actuality is also burnt away as the impossible surrounds the actual, limiting it to one rather than many.

This is more closely related to Bergson's understanding of the possible as a "preparation for the art of living" (Bergson 112). I would hesitate to attach this too readily to a preparation for the future simply because art, as a skillful and intuitive activity (not in a Bergsonian sense), cannot contain the future without becoming mechanized, therefore, losing its artfulness. In this way, possibility does not precede the real, but comes from it. Bergson warns that to interpret possibility as preceding the real is an illusion we create from retrospectively identifying causes that lead to the real, such as the unique contexts that produced an artist capable to creating a significant artwork like the readymade; rather, "it is the real which makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real" (Bergson 111). In other words, an object's possibility for becoming an artwork does not make it an artwork alone. This is important for locating Duchamp's possibility within other discussions, but this text is not meant to be a rumination on Duchamp's relationship with Bergson.[23] What stands out between Bergson, Derrida and Duchamp's conceptions of possibility is Duchamp's 'presentness.'[24] The presentness of

[23] There is certainly a relationship to be drawn between Duchamp and Bergson. Roughly contemporary with one another, they grapple with many of the same issues prevalent at that time. At minimum, Bergson influenced Duchamp's thoughts on space and time. See Frederico Luisetti's "Reflections of Duchamp: Bergson Readymade."
[24] For more on Dada's general relationship with presentism see Maria Stavrinaki's *Dada Presentism*.

possibilism serves to emphasize a lack of negativity as it focuses on an overflowing of the moment, not as it comes from the moments beforehand nor as it rolls into the next, but as it exists now. The readymade's possibility is excessively positive as it captures too many options for an object *now*.

Beauty

This possibility is an ungrounded and excessively positive notion of possibility that 'burns up' the negativity of aesthetics and callistics. Han provides us with a sense of why that might be. He goes to great lengths to describe beauty as dependent on the negative primarily because it engages the mind and plays with negativity in the form of concealment. "Concealment is essential to beauty […] Pornography—as nakedness without any drapes, without any secrets—is the opposite figure to beauty" (*Saving Beauty* 27). Pornography, for Han, quite simply, stands in opposition to beauty because nothing about it is hidden or maintains any form of depth; "Pornography has no interiority, hiddenness, or mystery" (*The Transparency Society* 26). In Han's words, "*beauty is a hideout*" (*Saving Beauty* 27) or, as Kant might say, the negativity of concealment generates a 'free play of the faculties.' Ironically, Han locates play within the realm of pornography, which is not only an oversight of the mechanisms of play but also a clear give away that Han's conception of beauty is more a consideration of callistics than aesthetics. Although he very briefly and intermittently touches on art,[25] his main interest

[25] It is interesting to note that Han's primary touch stone for art in *Saving Beauty* is Jeff Koons; "Jeff Koons, arguably the most successful living artist at present, is a master of smooth surfaces" (2), the 'smooth' being a primary concept for Han denoting the lack of a 'rough' Other. Koons also happens to take extensively from Duchamp's readymades. In the loosely paraphrased words of David Hopkins from his exhibition *Dada's Boys*, Koons

is the experience of beauty itself. The 'caustic' nature of possibility eats away at both because it lacks negativity. In this way, something that is truly beautiful should impact us, both in the literal and figurative sense. The possibility of revolution does not move us in the way revolution itself does. This is not a situation of merely liking or of pleasure, but something that cuts much deeper and only reveals its beauty over time upon reflection.

Duchamp's 'antiretinal' artwork suggests a similar approach in which a 'delay' is produced. Creating some friction between artwork and spectator, a hesitation appears in the interpretive process, causing an extension beyond a mere picture's aesthetics into contemplation. "It's merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture—to make a delay of it in the most general way possible, not so much in the different meaning in which delay can be taken, but rather in their indecisive reunion" (*Essential Writings* 26). Duchamp's concept of 'delay' is likely to be most well known in relation to his work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), also commonly referred to as the *Large Glass*, a work literally made on glass. To take this artwork as a point of reference for a moment, the indecisive reunion he aims to produce in 'delay' can, in very base and physical terms, be described as a merging of the images on glass with the images, textures and objects that inevitably appear simultaneously alongside it, through the glass. Of course, it must be mentioned that Duchamp's concept is more complex that this simple description, but by intermingling art and life through his *Large Glass* a delay is created, at least for a moment, in which some

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returned the readymade to the store Duchamp bought it from, specifically displaying various kinds of vacuums, basketballs and advertisements for their branding.

questions may be asked; which part is the art? Is it all art? Intentionally so? And, unavoidably, what does it all mean? It is in this way that Duchamp imagined possibility, or should I say, it is through an indecisive reunion that possibilities are forcibly brought to our attention in a moment of delay. Oversaturating and overdetermining an object, an artwork, a moment to the point of ambiguity, Duchamp's possibility is excessively positive. Though, in contrast to Han's conception of beauty, which requires negativity and concealment, Duchamp encourages contemplation through an overexposure to possibilities that disrupt quick (retinal) consumption.

The Creative Act

Duchamp wrote his note on possibility the same year he chose and assembled his first readymade, *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), an 'assisted readymade.' The readymade, by intention, was just an object to think with and to be 'distracted' by. As Duchamp notoriously describes it, he just "had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool and watch it turn" (*Essential Writings* 141). His first readymade served as a point of curious fixation—something for a "long and slow gaze" (*The Burnout Society* 21). Thus, Duchamp's readymades are objects of thought that shed light on Duchamp's turn away from aesthetics and 'retinal' art, which he felt was a shallow experience meant only for the eye.

Painting, in particular, had forgotten its more cerebral roots in religion, philosophy and morals, as Duchamp states in an interview: "Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error" (Cabanne 43). Prioritizing the eye in art produces pornographic depictions in which everything is

accessible without delay, no possibility for fantasy. Of course, pornography and fantasy are often tied together, but *this fantasy* is the fantasy developed in the last chapter that exists in the here and now. Pornography's full exposure only leaves room for an imagining that expands into *somewhere else* in which things are different, we are different, really outright Other than we are. The fantasy of delay must be found stemming from what is present in the way Bergson says, "it is the real which makes itself possible." The real experience of indecision in which we see multiple possible interpretations slipping around an object fulfils this present-possibility. It was only through Duchamp's tired vision, looking to his (I imagine lazily) spinning bicycle wheel, that he eventually came to see a possibility for it as art. There was a delay between its creation and its nomination as artwork. Though, crucially, the possibility of the readymade artwork did not consciously pre-exist the object itself, nor does its status as artwork require things to be other than they are.

We can see in Duchamp's construction of the creative act a form of possibility as it exists within Han's immunological and neuronal frameworks. It merges the two modalities. To understand how the creative act brings together the immunological and the neuronal we must return to Han's argument for eros, though this time from another book and a more successful interpretation.

In *The Agony of Eros*, Han shows the erotic is more than love and sex, but vitality. It brings life close to death and the Self close to the Other. It simultaneously maintains and dissolves the threshold between the Self and Other. Because of this, eros is immunological, and it contains a tendency toward the neuronal through an abandonment of the immunological's 'military dispositive' toward attack and defense techniques.

Essentially, it acknowledges the threshold between the Self and Other while simultaneously desiring to bridge it. For this reason, eros adds "vitality and turmoil" to thought, which in turn creates new possible thoughts. Given the arguments presented in *The Agony of Eros*, 'turmoil,' here, should be understood with emphasis on the turbulence that can similarly be found in Duchamp's 'indecisive reunion' rather than the more violent 'turmoil' of revolt and 'revolutions' that aim to clash and overcome (as opposed to spinning). Eros' disruptive, yet connective nature is both immunological and neuronal. It *connects* the inside with the outside and the Self with the Other. "Without eros, thinking is merely repetitive and additive," amounting to what Han fears is empty 'calculation' (*The Agony of Eros* 48). "Unlike calculation, thinking *gathers experience* by transforming and by *making other*" (*Topology of Violence* 99). It creates something new, something Other; it deviates. The negativity that exists within eros keeps thought from simply adding up, rather it dances and plays, producing new possibilities that are not limited to the projected outcomes of calculation. In fact, often existing completely outside the linear progression of calculation. Instead eros makes connections in unpredictable and seemingly illogical ways. It "pulls the subject out of itself, toward the Other," which "makes possible experience of the *Other's* otherness" (*The Agony of Eros* 3). The Other's involvement in thought produces unknown results. Without eros and without the Other, the production of new possibilities, new options, new choices—that are, coexisting and overdetermined in the field of Duchampian possibility—is impossible.

I should make clear that the relation about to be described in and through the creative act, its dependency on the Other, is only marginally neuronal. It cooperates with the Other, like eros, instead of trying to destroy it. This is a meaningful shift away from a

purely immunological mode supposedly defining the twentieth century, even though Duchamp describes it as a 'struggle.' Duchamp writes, "In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions […] The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of" (*Essential Writings* 139). The obscurity of the artist's subjective choices to themselves, while making an artwork, is parallel to Han's description of the effects of eros. The results of the artist's work have deviated from the artist's original intentions as they intuitively respond the material in front of them, changing with each new adjustment of colour or brush stroke and even the choice to simply put an object on display. This is tired fantasy at work.

There is, however, another stage in the creative act which is far more controversial. After the artist 'completes' their work it is "still in a raw state, which must be 'refined' as pure sugar from molasses, by the spectator" (*Essential Writings* 139). Just as the artist had 'subjective reactions' so too does the spectator. In this way a field of possibilities appears between the artist, their artwork and the spectator. Duchamp refers to this as a "gap." Without the interpretive gap between the artist and spectator no possibility for possibility can exist. If the intention of an artist amounted to the reception of their artwork, interpretation and thought would be pointless and without effect. The shared effort between the artist and spectator requires the experience of the "Other's otherness" made accessible by eros to generate meaning. Julian Jason Haladyn explains in his paper "On the Creative Act" that "on its most basic level 'The Creative Act' is Duchamp's recognition and articulation of this gap between the artist's *intentions* and the end result of the work as experienced by the spectator (and posterity)" ("On 'The

Creative Act' "). Haladyn mentions posterity in brackets because it is a temporal consequence of spectation. Over time the interpretations of the individual spectators amount to posterity, which raises subjective choices to canon.

Duchamp became aware of the gap in spectatorships, as it were, through the different responses his work received when shown in France compared to the United States. The shifting response between the two spectating communities "represented a key turning point in his career. When this same painting [*Nude Descending a Staircase*, No. 2 (1912)] was submitted a year before to the 1912 Salon des Indépendants it was regarded so poorly that Duchamp's brothers, on behalf of the organizers, asked him to change the painting" ("On 'The Creative Act' "). The same work went on to exhibit in the Armory Show where he was lauded as a symbol of modern art, gaining great success in America and eventually encouraging him to move to New York two years later. This radical shift in reception is unavoidably due to the main variable in the situation: the spectator. The art-object, then, is not an expression of an artist's intentions so much as it serves as an initial point of generation for possible interpretations. A field of possible interpretations ooze from the artwork to be picked up and refined by the spectator.

The gap between intentions and interpretation refines possibility into individual, subjective meanings. Duchamp's brilliance shines particularly bright in the creative act with his added concept of posterity. In this way, Duchamp's conception of the creative act necessarily involves a collaborative effort on two levels, individually and collectively, in order to refine the plurality of possibility to a single actuality, which can also referred to as art history. The individual artist cannot predict the reception of their artwork on their own. Haladyn acknowledges this in his book, *Étant donnés* (2010), on Duchamp's

final work, *Étant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau / 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (in English, *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas)* (1936–66), saying:

> Spectators participate in the creative act through their fulfilment of the possibilities Duchamp stages, a co-partnering that is taken to an extreme in the intermingling of real and imagined perceptions. For this reason what we are presented with is not the *real* but the *possible*, because the *possible*, according to Duchamp, implies 'the becoming—the passage from/one to the other.' (*Etant Donnes* 61).

As Haladyn outlines, Duchampian possibility depends on a bridge between the Self and Other. Meaning created from interacting with art cannot be summed up in the artist's intentions alone. The interpretive process of the creative act is never actually what it 'should' be in terms of what the artist wanted, but always slightly—unpredictably—askew from what was intended. There is always a necessary gap between the artist, artwork and spectator filled with possible interpretations. As Bergson said, reality is "fullness constantly swelling out, to which emptiness is unknown" (Bergson 101). This fullness appears to be something we can no longer ignore, filling in all the spaces in between with indecisive reunions and ambiguity. In this way, knowledge of these slippery possibilities crushes out negativity and, thinking back to the first chapter, room for rest or relaxation. Indeed, tired vision and playful observation have difficulty working here as well, as long as possibility is seen as something that we can 'get ahead of,' which is precisely what Bergson warns is an illusion. The possible does not lead to the real. It is only after that we look toward the past, searching for the (inevitable) events leading to the real outcome that we see the possible there, preparing to become the real.

Choice

Now is perhaps a good time to consider how choice interacts with possibility and to take a closer look at the readymade. First, it is important to summarize the context in which the readymade was first exhibited:

> The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists opened at the Grand Central Palace on the evening of April 10, 1917. Thousands gathered to celebrate the largest art exhibition ever held in New York, almost twice the size of the famous Armory Show four years earlier [… it] contained 2,125 works of painting and sculpture (*New York Dada* 177).

The Independents show intended to share with the public the then-contemporary state of American art. It was a response to a growing perception of an immunological opacity that existed between the galleries and exhibitions of the time, limiting a comprehensive view of contemporary art, which we should recognize as a neuronal impulse toward inclusivity and transparency.[26] This was seen as a problem after the Armory Show in 1913 which exposed the American public to the burgeoning modern art movements in Europe.

The Independents' primary intention was the dissolution of barriers that kept the diverse array of artistic styles separate. As a result, the exhibition was massive. Francis Naumann in his chronicling of the Independents Show noted the public's "most consistent objection was aimed at the immense size of the exhibition itself, which [the

[26] Transparency is a key concept for Han that was discussed in the first chapter. In short, it is the tendency toward open-access and clarity that smoothes and speeds exchange of capital and information. Han argues that this is a central feature to the achievement-subject's 'auto-exploitation' as they willingly expose themselves and empty out the private sphere to reduce negativity in the form of opacity.

spectators] found physically exhausting" (*New York Dada* 188). By responding to the growing desire for visibility of all the schools of artistic practice at that time the Independents were beginning to erode the opaque limits they felt capped artistic freedom and financial success. To accomplish this, the Independents advertised the exhibition as juryless, instead opting for admission upon membership and the payment of a fee. Theoretically, this provided a space lacking the negativity of exclusion and opacity. As the Independents say in their catalogue,

> No one exhibition at present gives an idea of contemporary American art in its ensemble, or permits comparisons of the various directions it is taking […] this exhibition will make it possible to form an idea of the state of contemporary art. No such survey could be obtained from a dozen visits to the exhibitions of former years, when none could claim to be thoroughly representative. (Independents Catalogue)

That is, the Independents sought to produce a neuronal space of over stimulation, transparency and information. In practice, it produced an exhausting experience of excess.

Their call for artwork claimed all artwork submitted with the payment of a member's fee would be included. This reasonably assumed submissions would come from artists (they certainly did not expect submissions from plumbers).[27] Duchamp's

[27] In the second issue of *The Blind Man*, a publication founded and supported by Beatrice Wood for the sake of "justifying the Fountain-Urinal" (Cabanne 56), a notorious line appears in a short article attributed to Duchamp: "The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges" ("The Richard Mutt Case" 154). Similarly, Marsden Hartley, who painted *The Warriors*, which served as the backdrop for *Fountain* in its infamous photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, said plumbers are "creators of aesthetic delights" (Camfield 64).

submission of a urinal under a pseudonym tested the committee's resolve to their own rules. The majority of whom wanted to exclude the object from the show, fearing it was a prank. The call for artwork was intended for an interior community of 'artists' largely defined by their hand-crafted objects that had a clear exterior Other of mass production. The immunological status of the exhibition was complicated by the Society's presentation of inclusivity, equality and, in the words of their guiding inspiration, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, "unlimited admission" (Independents Catalogue). This is, undeniably, a neuronal aim from an immunological standpoint. When the Independents were confronted with the industrial cast urinal as an artwork their interest in accepting all forms of artistic expression faltered. In this way, *Fountain* challenged the neuronal aim of the Independents, drawing out the limits of their inclusive assumptions and causing the jury to refuse to exhibit a submission from a supposedly non-juried exhibition.

The non-exclusion of *Fountain* resulted in scandal. Duchamp's use of mass-produced objects as artwork fulfilled a Dadaist interest in drawing together art and life. The sacred and exclusive character of art is by nature immunological, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century. The readymade artwork exposed the constructed nature of art by reducing the artist's role to the choice of an object and, at most, the addition of a signature. He was arguing that all artwork is fundamentally a choice or series of choices by an artist. As Duchamp purportedly wrote supporting the inclusion of *Fountain* in the exhibition: "Whether Mr Mutt [the pseudonym Duchamp used to submit *Fountain*] with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared

under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object" ("The Richard Mutt Case" 154).

In Duchamp's view, it was not the craftsmanship of an object which made it *art* but the inventive choice of its presentation that 'created a new thought for that object.' Emphasizing contemplation and a slow, tired gaze, Duchamp makes it clear that his definition of art depends on the neuronal in the most basic sense. Indeed, the readymades were initially thought experiments, not art, as he says explicitly to Pierre Cabanne:

> Please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it. The word 'readymade' did not appear until 1915, when I went to the United States. It was an interesting word, but when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a 'readymade,' or anything else. It was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason to do it or any intention of showing it, or describing anything. No, nothing like all that… (Cabanne 47)

The development of the readymades grew from an (inter)neuronal optics. Duchamp had watched the spin of the bicycle wheel simply for its 'distraction.' The various objects Duchamp would go on to collect in his New York studio continue to emphasize the neuronal features of the readymade as they "went largely unnoticed" (*Marcel Duchamp* 72). The readymades, understandably, would be nearly invisible to an immunological optics. They were merely objects, lacking any attack and defense. They were void of conflict, opinion, or the pang of beauty before Duchamp posed his challenge to the Independents' commitment and their inclusive art exhibition.

The readymade fit perfectly into the 'blind spot' of the immunological as it emphasizes the nominal quality of art Duchamp had come to strongly believe in. Each

readymade is indifferent to its status as art or object, it simply takes the linguistic categories we apply to it. This is particularly well exemplified in the story recounted by George Heard Hamilton of when he and Katherine Dreier staged an exhibition of Duchamp's work at Yale in 1945. When the exhibition toured to a museum in Minnesota a janitor mistook *In Advance of a Broken Arm* as an ordinary shovel. Without complaint or combat the readymade becomes an artwork upon its labelling as such, ready at a moment's notice to once again become an object. Once an object it can revert back to an artwork without pause.

Importantly, the challenge presented by *Fountain* is not an immunological opposition from the Other, but an internal infarction Duchamp carefully frames within the history of art. After travelling in 1912 to the museums of Basel, Munich, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Prague and Vienna Duchamp realized that art had a long history tied to intellectual stimulation rather than what he recognized as the modern tendency toward purely retinal stimulation. Duchamp's tour of many of the Western world's masterpieces marks a notable turn in his approach to art. Duchamp explains that his aim as an artist became something that "consists in a combination, or at least in an expression, which only the grey cells can reproduce" (Alain Jouffroy's "Conversation avec Marcel Duchamp" quoted by Molderings 16–7). To do this he purposely disrupted the preconceived notions of what art meant and what it could be, which he felt were fundamentally nominalist. Rather than attempting to find a stable and consistent description to define art, Duchamp recognized the socially conditioned and unstable nature of it. By posing readymade objects as artwork he drew attention to the always present possibility of art upon the designation of an object as artwork, which turns

Duchamp's challenge inward toward the spectator's subjective decision to name something as an artwork as they see fit.

To frame this challenge within Hanian language, what does art look like without the Other, a fundamentally stable definition or the exclusionary boundaries of art and non-art? This is significant because it draws attention to a need for flexibility that the Dadaists, and Duchamp in particular, captured so well in their playfulness. Their readiness to do away with society's expected meanings and replace them with "nothing." For Duchamp, this is a question we must continually and individually judge. Upon each questioning we tear down the immunological wall between art and object to then build it up again in a continual re-play, akin to setting up the pieces of a chess board again and again after each game. Within this repetition conflict becomes meaningless. Death and destruction have no consequence. The opposing black and white pieces are both caught in the same loop. It only makes sense to refer to them as opposing within a certain distance before they both become part of the same game. Similarly, upon each judgement we reconstruct an illusionary veil that reduces the possibility of what art can be to what it *should* be, to an actuality. This urinal is art; it is *Fountain*, but it is still a urinal.

Similar to the playing out of a chess match only to be reset at the end of the game, the readymade performs a strange folding back into itself, somewhat like a mobius strip, between the neuronal possibility of what *can* and the immunological limits of what *should* be. The readymade *can* be art or object, but any engagements we individually or collectively make with it define what it *should* be, at least for a moment. For this reason, the readymade encourages an (inter)neuronal engagement which keeps an open-minded willingness to revaluate the object's definition. The readymade is an indecisive reunion,

too full and overdetermined, but intentionally so. In contrast, the neuronal optics Han presents, or 'bingewatching,' is a passive acceptance of whatever nomination might be applied to a urinal or other objects, thereby reducing its possible interpretations to one: whatever we are told.

Decision

> The alleged indecency of this object forced artists and members of the general public alike to confront the obvious philosophical issues raised by an artist who, upon the placement of his signature, assumed the near godlike power of transforming a pristine, mass-produced object into a unique work of art—even if, in the end, viewers chose to exclude it from the realm of aesthetic consideration. (*New York Dada* 46)

As Naumann notes, spectators of *Fountain* and the Independents who 'rejected' it from their exhibition believed they could choose one interpretation of the object. Of course, this decisive move to "supress" *Fountain*, as Duchamp put it, was unsuccessful (Cabanne 55). Maintained within a small group of artists and friends of Duchamp after the controversy with the Independents, the possibility of a urinal-as-art resurfaced thirty years later eventually garnering Duchamp as 'an-artist,' *par excellence*, as he preferred to be titled, influencing much of the artistic production in American in the 1960s and after. By 2004, Duchamp's *Fountain* was named the most influential piece of modern art—quite the comeback for a supposedly extinguished possibility.[28]

[28] See "Duchamp's urinal tops art survey" *BBC NEWS*.

The decision presented by *Fountain* is misleading, etymologically implying a negation or separation from other possibilities. Decision, as in *de-caedere,* its Latin root, means to 'cut off.' Deciding between possibilities, that is, making a choice and actualizing that choice has the distinct quality of immunological exclusion. However, the decision present in Duchamp's *Fountain* is not exclusionary. It does not cut off other possibilities. It holds on to them, looping back around, continuously and exhaustingly. *Fountain,* for Duchamp, is just as much a urinal as it ever was. It is continually both. In fact, Duchamp offers us a better word than 'decision.' Arbitration, in the sense of negotiation rather than its more decisive connection with 'judgement,' navigates differing views peacefully, without destruction.[29] As a practice it sees similarities in order to bridge difference. It opens up conversation in order to understand and work together. The choice spectators make in relation to *Fountain* is an arbitration between the object, its context and our taste.

As Katherine Dreier notes in a letter to Duchamp, attempting to smooth relations after the fallout of *Fountain*'s suppression from the Independents Show, she was looking for arbitration: "I did not see anything pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could not also have seen it" (Camfield 30). Dreier wanted Duchamp to return to the Independents committee, which he had been a founding member of, to arbitrate between the perspectives simultaneously available in the *Fountain*-urinal. She saw that the

[29] Duchamp preferred the title of 'generator-arbitrator' instead of 'curator' for both the *International Exhibition of Surrealism* in 1938 and the *First Papers of Surrealism* in 1942.

decision present in the readymade can be returned to, readdressed and rehashed as it has been over the last century by many theorists and artists alike.[30]

The possibility of *Fountain* as a urinal is just as present after a decision that it is artwork as it ever was. To some this is certainly the cause of neuronal affliction. They know that the 'most influential artwork of the twentieth century' can be just another object simply by placing it in the bathroom of the gallery. Their decision that it is artwork does nothing to solidify the possibilities for this object.

Too much

Neuronal pain does not come from the impossible, but the too possible. The possibilities of *Fountain* serve as a wonderful point of reference for discussing neuronal affliction because of its relatively simplistic problematic: is it, or is it not, art? The answer, of course, is *yes.* Both possible answers are equally valid. To mince the words of Joyce Cheng, the urinal "can be understood as sculpture *but not only as such*" (Cheng 276).[31] There is too much possible to be actual. The multiple neuronal connections were untenable in the context of New York in 1917. "From the time of the Armory Show," Naumann notes, "most objects open to double readings were met with bewilderment by the American critics" (*New York Dada* 183). This inability to conceive of multiple, coexisting possibilities was also expressed contemporaneously by American artist Louise Norton, friend and collaborator of Duchamp's.

[30] Dreier, at this time, likely did not know Duchamp was behind *Fountain*. Duchamp was quite secretive about his role in submitting *Fountain* until its resurgence decades later.
[31] Here, Cheng is actually speaking to the performances and objects of Zurich Dada.

In her article “Buddha of the Bathroom,” Norton ruminates with frustration and mockery over the ability to conceive of people as multiples but not objects, “although a man [may] marry he can never be *only* a husband […] But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogamy” (“Buddha of the Bathroom” 154). Norton’s use of ‘monogamy’ is in reference to an ‘irrevocably associated’ understanding of a urinal’s utilitarian function. Hence, *Fountain* was largely incomprehensible as two concurrent, separate things. The immunological mentality of the American public was unable to accept the inclusive sameness within the urinal and the artwork. Han would call this the ‘inferno of the same,’ in which the Other has been replaced by mere difference. *Fountain’s* double reading as both art and object dissolved the threshold between the two. Instead, they are only two different readings of the same thing. To the public at this time the physical object, being singular, should have a single designation.

Duchamp’s ‘figuration of a possible’ lacks the destruction of immunological impossibility, creating a mental space where contradictory possibilities are preserved and can be ‘retrieved under the right circumstances,’ just as the nomination of art is retrieved from other possible nominations for an object when an artist places said object into a gallery. Positive, neuronal possibility is then unsurprisingly, psychic, virtual and disconnected from immunological conflict as embodied by the impossible.

Possibilism

What afflicts us, then, within art, is the interpretive problem of whether the readymade is, or is not, art. Duchamp exposes this problem for what it often is, fashion. The possibility

of a urinal, or vista, or nude being art is always present—was always present—but mediated by the hand. Duchamp's witty intervention was to show the decision at its most fundamental, pivoting on the choice of the artist. Rather than using the skilled hand of the artist to conceal his artistic choices, Duchamp exposed the fundamental process of artistic creation and, arguably, the creation of meaning itself. This made extraordinarily clear the possibilities of his readymades and objects in general. "Duchamp's new artistic techniques resulted from an aesthetic concept which was based primarily on 'possibilism.' It was neither likeness and truth, as observed by all the various brands of realism, nor beauty, harmony, and balance, the essence of all formalist aesthetics, which were central to these techniques, but 'the possible'" (Molderings 19). Consequently, anything *can* be art after the readymade. Though, the question Duchamp posed to his spectators was not "can it be art?", but "*should* it be art." In this way, the production of possibilities, of what *can be*, burns away the preconceived notions of taste. It is caustic to aesthetics.

Herbert Molderings believes that Duchamp came to this new possibility-focused technique through studying the work of late nineteenth century polymath, Henri Poincaré. Poincaré had developed a neo-positivist notion of mathematics connected to conventionalism, the philosophical belief that fundamental principles come from agreement rather than external factors. "In radicalizing Poincaré's conventionalist arguments, Duchamp arrives at the nominalist conclusion that all axioms, principles, and laws are the inventions and constructs of scientists and do not reflect the 'true essence' of reality but constitute constantly changing 'truths' " (Molderings 19). Duchamp's use of Poincaré's conventionalism leads him, following Molderings' argument, to challenge

many of the preconceptions in art at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is useful for investigating Han's neuronal affliction because it sheds light on a particular side of the problem not explored by Han.

Specifically, Duchampian possibility is significant for understanding the neuronal as detached from opposition, in terms of contrast and antithesis. He does not offer what is, but what *could be*. In this way, Duchamp also offers us an understanding of how neuronal affliction occurs by applying immunological optics to neuronal systems. Duchamp positions his artworks' challenge so that the conflict he inspires is not with the Other, but between internal contradictions and assumptions. Today, we see this in Han's achievement-subjects. They work themselves to death, to an extent literally, exhausted by a shift from 'subject' to 'project.' That is to say, "The late-modern achievement-subject is subject to no one. In fact, it is no longer a subject in the etymological sense (subject to, *sujet à*). It positivizes itself; indeed, it liberates itself into a *project.*" The project works on itself, but "the project turns out to be a *projectile* that the achievement-subject is aiming at itself," one achievement at a time (*The Burnout Society* 46–7). Though, approaching neuronal affliction through Duchamp's possibilism, Han's 'project' as a "figure of constraint" fails to meet the terms of their own suffering, that of the *too much* (*In the Swarm* 48). Today's stress, depression, hyperactivity, burnout—its neuronal affliction—in my view, is the product of our knowledge of sheer possibilities mingled with the scientific mindset that these outcomes can be predicted and optimized. In other words, the 'achieving project' is aware of what it *can* do, yet, for one reason or another, is unable to do them all. Thus, satisfaction, relaxation, and self-value are perpetually just out of reach on the other side of the gap so full of possibility.

Duchamp's interest in the purely positive possible begins to draw attention to the problems of excess and Otherlessness established by Han. Duchamp's 'nominalist and historicist way of thinking' expounds on this by showing that the possibility of what can be called art is vast, maybe infinite, highlighted by his famous line, "I like living, breathing better than working... my art is that of living" (Cabanne 72). This expansive definition is itself a figuration of the problem. The problem exists in the plurality of possibilities that unfurl in the wake of this profound shift away from art as an externally defined entity in the form of painting and sculpture; Duchamp's nominalist approach toward art saw past the limits of the artist's hand necessarily being involved in the production of artworks. Simultaneously, Duchamp's 'art of living' appears to escape the problems Han describes for two reasons. He was still very clearly pushing against thresholds that have since disappeared. And, as the naïve absurdity of his statement points to, Duchamp approached his art with a sense of playfulness that appears to have kept depression and burnout at bay. Producing new ideas and perspectives, mental adventures if you will, took priority in Duchamp's work rather than investigations of metaphysics and 'truth,' such as his contemporaries, especially outside of Dada. A degree of seriousness seems to have also been washed away with our move toward discovery and possibility. This Dadaist approach to neuronal affliction escapes some of the bleakness found in Han's descriptions. For Han, we are doomed to our contemporary depression and burnout. Though, looking back on Dada's early expressions of neuronal affliction, we do not find a refusal or negativity but an abundance of options, possibilities and playfulness.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have brought together Dada and Byung-Chul Han's concept of affliction in order to understand why we might be facing a crisis of fantasy that is affecting the arts and, consequently, society in general. The similarities between Han and Dada are surprisingly abundant, the majority of which I have not had time or space to address here. The relationship between Han and Dada suggests that Dada has a central position in understanding why and how we experience pain in modern and contemporary culture, but also identifies base assumptions we make about the world and its workings. Importantly, Dada's unique historical position, which imbues it with both immunological and neuronal features, suggests that Dada contains answers or at least alternatives for how this new neuronal age might be able to live with its affliction of too many possibilities, too much to do, too much to see and the depression of never being able to achieve it all. Such an abundance creates infarctions—clots—that restrict access to an elusive *somewhere else*.

This is why a suggestion made by Amelia Jones has caught my attention; it is through *elision* that the avant-garde is able to radically change culture without necessarily falling into the immunological trap of opposition and conflict. In *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* Jones asks, if the militaristic term 'avant-garde' presents artists as "the soldiers at the *front* of culture […] how can an artist identified as a soldier fighting on behalf of radical aesthetic intervention be reconciled with the figure of the evader or noncombatant escaping the war and staying, in the most cowardly fashion, at the home front?" Her answer: "Primarily through elision" (Jones 57–8).

Elision is a slurring of the rough spaces between words and ideas. It is the omission as well as the merger of thoughts that occur between other thoughts. The elision of sounds in speech amounts to contractions that are not so much exclusionary as a flattening and smoothing out of details for the sake of speed and comfort. Its etymological root, *elidere*, literally means to 'crush out.' Elision occurs because there is *too much.* It is excessively positive and for this reason is a surprisingly apt way to describe what has appeared in this thesis.

Dada's expression of neuronal affliction almost a century before Polly Matzinger's paper arguing for its own kind of elision of friendly and dangerous cells disrupts Han's paradoxically dualist depiction. Their collage, readymades, sound poetry, mechanomorphs, and interest in the merger of art and life are methods of crushing out the distance between images, objects, voices, words, and bodies. In these Dadaist techniques things begin to overlap, contract and merge with one another. Tzara's sound poetry, Ernst's collages and Duchamp's signifiers are so full they feel as though meaning is being pushed out through their seams. These works leave a sense of uneasiness, which after thinking about them in relation to Han's theory of neuronal affliction has led me to believe this is not because their elision is leaving things out. Their omission is, if anything, traditional. Their uneasiness lies in the way elision merges their disparate pieces together. These methods manifest and draw attention to excess and a societal and technological drive for speed and rationality, key features of the neuronal.

Elision does not simply omit. It is a moment in speech or a 'curation' of ideas that is continually reworked with a desubjectified subjectivity, something Han repeatedly calls for in his writing. Here I am specifically thinking of playfulness. The compression

of words into contractions or the selective choice of moments to compose a history or narrative invites a particular approach that is not best found by logic, but something more transient. Elision's contractions are not permanent, but fleeting, perhaps habitual, but not wholly destructive. Moments of omission can be replayed. This is what has stood out to me as Dada's unique contribution to understanding neuronal affliction. They are unrelentingly playful. Comparatively, Han's burnt out achievement-subjects of the late-modern period appear to have lost their ability to play.

Eugen Fink, in his essay *Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play*, describes play as something that is meant to "function as an occasional interruption" (Fink 19). When the original German edition of this essay was published in 1960 play was described as something "thought of more or less as a frivolous and pleasurable nonsense, as a carefree sojourn in the airy realm of phantasy and sheer potentialities, as an escape from unyielding reality to a dream utopia" (Fink 19). If 'unyielding reality' does not describe the atmosphere during WWI as well as today's concerns of late capitalism then I have grossly misunderstood these situations. Escaping into 'pleasurable nonsense' was, and to an extent still is, seen as the privilege of children, although the Dadaists boldly used nonsense in their critiques of society and culture, usually treating them with a measure of humour (because what else do you do at the end of the world?). Importantly, a feature of play is its lack of obligation, which allows for the spontaneous, uninhibited behaviour of playfulness. The knot of social constructions that usually surround us in the real world loosen during play to be replaced by the rules of play. As Fink notes, "play is characterized by a calm, timeless, 'presence' and autonomous, self-sufficient meaning" (Fink 21). In this way, play's activity and creativity seem meditative,

allowing new thoughts and approaches to bubble up spontaneously as the autonomous and self-sufficient nature of play does not require a consistency. Play is free to explore new and unpredictable futures without an obligation to past, present or future situations. For this reason, play is uninhibited and unrestrained, free to explore all the possibilities afforded by imagination while remaining in the present moment and 'tired' fantasy. This should sound strikingly similar to the 'tired vision' described in the second chapter, allowing for a 'long and slow gaze' that indifferently, but not disinterestedly, observes the world. Both create a buffer around the world for contemplation, whether it be purely mental or more embodied. From this slow process of 'looking' we can use a (inter)neuronal optics to learn and appreciate the 'fantasy' of the world.

The integration of the dangerous Other into the safety of the Self has been a momentous turn in our relationship with the world, which does not necessarily have to be described within 'play,' but certainly bears some merit when we consider Han's suggestion that this transition occurred with Polly Matzinger's work and not with Dada. In Matzinger's work in immunology this marked an important shift in understanding biology and the inter-workings of nature. Different parts of a cell can experience the same situation in radically different ways, finding something as fundamental to life as water both dangerous and necessary. Han used this term in immunology to support his idea that "the Cold War ended precisely as this paradigm shift was taking place" and "it is marked by the disappearance of *otherness and foreignness*" (*The Burnout Society* 2). Though, his presentation is overly-simplistic and purposely provocative. The Other has not simply disappeared. Instead, it has been absorbed into the Self, creating a hybrid identity that is both safe and dangerous. The Self is now just as alienating as it is

comforting, which produces a problem: how do we relax, breathe and take a step back from the things that threaten us, as well as the things that please us, to contemplate and appreciate them in order to imagine possibilities for where we go next?

While in play we are able to hold two worlds or interpretations simultaneously, similar to the way Duchamp does with his readymades. Within an immunological context these two worlds would destroy each other, but a curious, (inter)neuronal optics maintains permeable walls between. This is simply because the play world is intricately interwoven with the real world. This is an unavoidably important part of artistic practice that is easily overlooked by art historians and theorists unfamiliar with a creative process that intersects with materials. In *Flight out of Time* Hugo Ball describes the significance of material as it seeds the human with possibilities (and not the other way around),

> We were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness. Although we could not have imagined it five minutes earlier, we were walking around with the most bizarre movements, festooned and draped with impossible objects, each one of us trying to outdo the other in inventiveness. (Ball 64)

In this way, the fantasies of play do not overwrite or destroy the real world. Instead it embellishes it, often drawing in more engagement from other people, promoting unpredictable outcomes or 'carefree sojourns in the airy realm of phantasy and sheer potentialities.' It should not go unnoticed, too, that "in the period that saw the rise of the Dada movement, the historian Johan Huizinga and literary critic Walter Benjamin were

particularly advanced in responding to the crisis of interwar European culture and politics with a new anthropology based on the notion of play" (Cheng 276). Huizinga, the legendary play scholar, was unravelling the 'play-element' at work within culture and Benjamin was building upon Baudelaire's philosophy of toys. *Homo ludens*, as it were, were becoming a significant point of research during the most clearly identifiable periods of conflict in human history. This adds credence to play, in which, unlike the fantasies of the Other, such as schizophrenic experiences—those who have lost all contact with the real world in favour of the fictional realm of imagination—the player layers the two worlds in a way that the play world develops from the real world and then infuses it with new potentialities. The overlapping but separate worlds of play and reality seem incredibly appropriate here. As the fantasy of play is fed by real world objects and contexts, play distances itself from its real world roots: plastic cups become police hats, fallen sticks become wands, and beds become ships at sea or vital islands of relief from oceans of lava. Of course, this is a purposeful reference to the observations of Han, Crary and Handke that sleep is perhaps the last threshold we have in the neuronal age. But is the tiredness Handke describes not a low-energy kind of play? If we can tease out a space between hyperactive work and complete exhaustion, is that not when we make fantastic dinners and see the glimmer of everyday things that owes some of its shine to something other than light? This hardly seems to be the collapse of the Other into the Self that I described in the first chapter, but it does rely on an interweaving of the two that Han's immunological framework does not quite describe. The real world provides the player with fodder to distort and adapt in playful behaviour, which then in turn seeds the real world with new ways of being. Although a number of the Dadaists had diagnosed mental

illnesses or questionable mental health, their actions, artworks and observations cannot be brushed aside as the ravings of lunatics, as tended to be the case before the 1950s and 60s within artistic circles and the 1970s in more academic spheres. It is because of their playfulness, their two-worldliness, that I believe the Dadaists were so inventive, influential and neuronal.

Dada's playfulness represents a turn away from a logic extending all the way back through the Enlightenment to the Renaissance, which placed human reason at the centre of reality. Hans Arp wrote in "Dadaland," "the Renaissance taught men the haughty exaltation of their reason. Modern times, with their science and technology, dedicated them to megalomania. The confusion of our epoch is the result of this overestimation of reason" (Arp quoted in Sheppard, *Modernism* 179). The sentiment of this statement emphasizes the Dadaists' push toward irrationalism, away from the 'overestimation of reason'. In my view, this is an understanding that resisting the change is unhelpful and, ultimately, exhausting—better to use the momentum of reason's failures in order to move through to somewhere else. Although I believe reinstating negativity, as Han suggests, would be a step toward a healthy sense of fantasy and the cultivation of a 'somewhere else,' excess positivity in our technological, sociological and ontological trajectories is our current context. Attempting to reinstate negativity is regressive and wishful thinking. To carry forward, it is easiest to go with the flow, as it were.

Steven Shaviro has suggested in his development of an accelerationist aesthetics that in order to escape the seemingly inescapable grip of neoliberal capitalism we must go through, which we find mimicked by Tzara when he argues "Dada is the signboard of abstraction; advertising and business are also elements of poetry" (Tzara 38). By

doubling down on our accelerating situation of excess positivity, we can produce otherwise unimaginable possibilities. Possibilities that remain hidden due to the blinders of immunological optics presuming there are thresholds which external forces are pushing against. Resisting the advances of capitalism only serves to feed it more commodities for it to sell back to us. As Han says, the issues we face in the neuronal age "elude all technologies and techniques that seek to combat what is alien" (*The Burnout Society* 1).

The afflictions Han identifies for the neuronal age (burnout, depression, hyperactivity) are produced without threat, that is, without risk of injury from external forces. Instead, neuronal affliction is produced by disappointment with our own failures to achieve all that we wish we were. The crisis of climate change I think weighs on us the way it does because, first, it appears that we are the sole cause and, secondly, because we believe we should be better than that. Judging from my research, the Dadaists felt the same way about the devastation of World War I. In this way, Han's claim that we are facing a 'crisis of fantasy' seems not to be a crisis at all, but a poverty in perception. As Shaviro says in his book, *No Speed Limit* (2015), the 'crisis' we experience today does not follow from the traditional use of the term. "We continually find ourselves in what we might well call a crisis," but whatever we are experiencing does not bear the same immediacy. "A *crisis*," he tells us, "is a turning point, a sudden rupture, a sharp and immediate moment of reckoning." If we think back to Han's concept of injuring beauty, the sudden rupture of crisis is clearly an immunological affair. "But for us today, a crisis has been a chronic and seemingly permanent condition." This new sense of crises "never come to a culmination; instead, they are endlessly and indefinitely deferred" (9). This is

clearly a neuronal affliction in which our primary experience is not a 'sudden rupture' but an overwhelming, prolonged sense of bad faith. The 'crisis' Shaviro describes then, is not one of negativity but positivity, something which requires entirely new techniques, not to combat, but to work *with.*

Dada has, at minimum, supplied initial language for expressing neuronal affliction, but it may hold more clues. One of which is an encouragement of tiredness and the cultivation of rest in a broad sense, which promotes possibilism and an accelerating of objects (their meaning, not necessarily their quantity). Developing tiredness over our current neuronal affliction of exhaustion encourages a playfulness that would undoubtedly break up the perpetual sense of crisis. Crucially, this is not a resistance to an accelerating world but a layering of possible alternatives. Drawing the Self and Other together through the lens of play fosters a way of seeing the world and understanding its complex relations that makes things "flicker, twinkle, and vibrate at the edges." It is immediately apparent in the artwork and activities of Dada that this is not a twinkling of fairy dust, but something closer to the 'convulsion' André Breton attributed to beauty. The question, then, that I find myself asking of our neuronal age is: For all our entertainment, games and interactivity, are we really playing?

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